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Frank B. Elser





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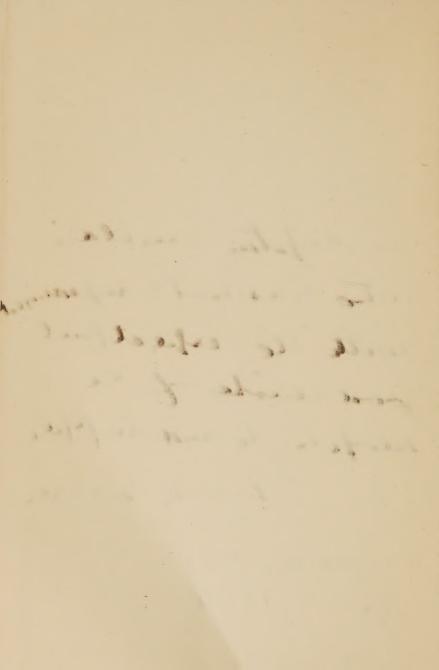
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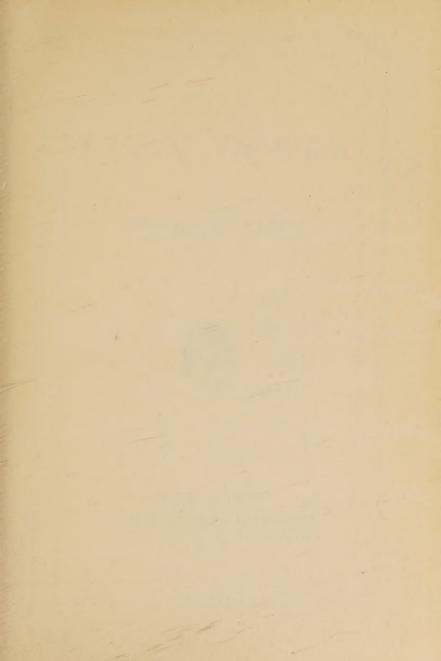
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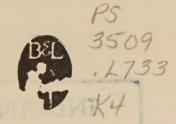
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THE KĘEN DESIRE

FRANK B. ELSER



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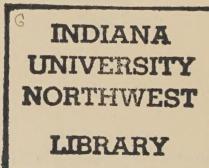
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Book I Windmills of Youth



BOOK I

Chapter I

EARLY every year in Carrolton the combined Sunday School classes of the First Baptist Church held a picnic in the Sisters Grove. It was called the Sisters Grove because sometimes in the past it had been owned by the Catholics, and silent women in hoods used to be seen there with children, orphans. In their black and white the Sisters looked like magpies, but in their calm they were not at all like them, unless you can imagine magpies becoming suddenly mute and walking with great stateliness.

Possibly the Catholics sold the grove, or it may have been they simply ceased to come. In any event they were no longer seen there, walking ahead of long queues of pale little girls all dressed alike, and so the Baptists came; and on this day, which was a Saturday in June, 1893, they were holding their annual picnic. Picnics were held, not given, and one was just like another. The big boys hated to come, but they did, and the teachers hated to come, but they did; and only the small children seemed to derive pleasure from it, the small children and the Sunday School Superintendent. His name was Sterrett—W. T. Sterrett—and he was also the principal of the high school.

Mr. Sterrett liked gatherings of all kinds. He could speak then and glide about, and speaking and gliding about appealed to him. He wore a wing collar, an unusual adornment in Carrolton in those days, and he had a silky light brown moustache. His tongue was very red, almost obscenely so, and it was a habit with him to run it out and caress the under-side of his silky moustache before he spoke. He did this also at intervals as he spoke, and always after he spoke.

Though none of the children sensed it, and possibly none of the teachers, Mr. Sterrett derived a sort of erotic satisfaction from picnics. The big girls giggled with a new nervous note when they were out in the woods, and nearly always some big boy did something coarse; or some wilful girl, most likely from a common family, would wander off with a group of boys, or perhaps with only one boy, and this would cause a commotion. There were no flappers in Carrolton in this year, which was nearly thirty years ago; and unlike to-day ordinary things were usually done by ordinary people. The cleavage between good and bad girls was very definite.

The Grove lay in a bend of the river. Along almost all its length the river had sandy banks and mud bottom, but around and near the Grove the banks were white shale, bluish white. There were little peninsulas of this shale, cute little fellows, like cleverly constructed parts of a bas-relief map, and they made all manner of sheltered coves, places to wade, places to bathe, as intimate, some of them, as a bath tub, and as neat. Neater. In Carrolton in 1893 there was probably not a single porcelain tub. People did not bathe casually then any more than they served alcohol casually. Drinking was done deliberately in saloons by men only, and bathing was done deliberately in tin tubs, on Saturday nights.

As inviting as the river was, swimming was not allowed. Boys in Carrolton did not have bathing suits then, and few girls swam at all. When boys swam they swam naked, and naturally they were not supposed to swim at the picnic. The bigger boys always slipped away and went up the river to a swimming hole called Red Bird; but although Mr. Sterrett knew this he never made any protest. He could easily spot them on their return by their wet hair and shiny, streaked faces, vet he never said a word. Either he was afraid of them or else he hoped deep within him that some day they would try to swim right around the grove during the picnic. This would have been scandalous. Mr. Sterrett could see it all in his mind's eye. Some teacher or one of the older girls would come running up to him strangely excited and cry: "The big boys are in swimming. They have all their clothes off. We can see them. Oh, it's terrible!" And Mr. Sterrett would run down the bank, and there they would be, white limbs shimmering in the water, heads wet and shiny, like seals, some swimming about slowly and defiantly, grinning, others floating rather daringly on their backs; a few, a little ashamed of themselves, keeping well under water over against the opposite bank, or perhaps within one of the little coves. He would have shouted to the teacher who told him, "Keep the girls back!" and then he would have given those boys a piece of his mind. Dirty, vile things! He would order them out of the water and make them dress, keeping up a running fire of comment all the while, every now and then glancing back to see if any of the girls were looking. He always felt they would look: that would be the worst of it.

But nothing like this had ever happened. The picnic to-day had been just like all the others. Things to eat—sandwiches, jelly cake, layer cake, fruit, fried chicken, preserves, all had been pooled and were being eaten off lap-robes and old table-cloths spread on the ground, lumpy treacherous surfaces on which jars upset easily and over which ants crawled. When these ants were crushed they left a pungent odor on the hand.

Only the little children, and more especially the little girls, ate with any sort of freedom. The boys reached for things and then got up and stood back, munching stolidly; the older girls and the teachers ate mincingly and spent a great deal of their time trying to pass things to others, saying, "Do take some of this. It's really quite nice." The article referred to was not infrequently one brought by the speaker. A great deal of swapping went on this way. Mr. Sterrett was helped bountifully. His things were on a plate, heaped high. He took chowchow and several kinds of preserves, and he sat at the end of one of the lap-robes, legs crossed, smiling between bites. After swallowing he would run out his tongue and caress the under surface of his moustache.

Back in the woods birds were calling. And directly overhead were birds—tiny little woodpeckers whose protective coloration made them all but invisible; jays, very noisy ones, a cardinal or two, brilliant and melancholy, and sparrows. The trees were Live Oaks, which are the evergreens of the Southwest, and hackberries and pecan.

The picnickers neither heard nor saw the birds. But at intervals the presence of the sparrows overhead was borne in on them, painfully. Or perhaps painfully is not the word. There was a thrill in it. Faces would grow

slowly red as eyes were averted from small spots appearing so suddenly that it seemed as if they must have come from below rather than above; and when a boy squawked despite himself or a girl tittered Mr. Sterrett would very carefully lower whatever he was eating and fix the deprayed child with a look that was terrible. He said nothing. His look said, "So. That's the kind you are. Here we all are in the midst of nature and you—you—desecrate it!"

TT

Martin Lavery was nine years old. For four years he had been coming to the annual picnic of the First Baptist Church. He came with the same feeling that accompanied him to Sunday School. It was done and he was at a loss to explain, even to himself, why it should not be done. And yet he loathed them. He loathed the first one he went to, the second one, the third; and to-day, the fourth, he loathed even more. He loved birds and he knew the correct names of a great many of them; he liked the woods, and for a little fellow he was familiar with nearly all the native trees. But he would no more have disclosed this knowledge or talked of trees or birds or anything about nature in this company than he would have cut off his right hand. He could not express it, but picnickers and the woods did not go together. They shamed the birds and the birds shamed them. Departing they left behind them tin cans, crumpled newspapers, greasy paper bags, and pickle bottles with brine still in them. They laughed too loudly or too much or, in other

moods, too low and too little. All of this was inarticulate, yet Martin felt it and deeply.

The eating especially embarrassed him. He avoided things in jars and bottles. They required deliberate removal, while everybody watched, and it frightened him to think of it. This was inconsistent, because he himself had brought things in bottles and in cans as well. He had brought sandwiches, too, bread and butter ones, hastily prepared by the negro cook at home. His mother was not much of a church woman and she had forgotten all about the picnic. She did things like that. Reminded of it at the last moment she had said to the cook: "Make up some nice sandwiches for Martin, Jinny," just as casually as she would have said, "Get me a glass of water"; and then she had told Martin to skip down to the corner grocery and get what he wanted and charge it. Martin had selected, rather vaguely, sardines, canned tongue and preserved figs. They were little balloon-shaped figs, packed fascinatingly tight in a clear amber liquid. Martin had had them, and enjoyed them, in the diner on trains. He bought them for the picnic conscious of the fact that very likely he would not eat any-but they were nice. He had turned in all his stuff at the central commissary, and now he sat detached from the main group of picnickers, silent, embarrassed, sullen. Sterrett annoyed him, the set smiles of the teachers annoyed him. For the moment his mother annoyed him. She had not exactly made him come to the picnic, but she had not told him not to come, and here he was. He felt somehow that his mother did not take church picnics seriously. She had never said so, but the way his lunch was prepared suggested it. Some mothers, he knew,

made a great to-do over their children's lunches: cooked chicken, made cake, prepared several kinds of sandwiches, and wrapped everything carefully and neatly in tissue paper and a clean napkin.

In a way Martin was glad his mother did not do this. If she had maybe he would have thought differently of picnics, and he would not have liked that. It pleased him to feel that he alone saw the joke. He felt the same way when the music teacher came to his class at school on Wednesdays. She beamed on the children and spoke in silly artificial tones. In writing out a piece of music on the blackboard she explained that the notes were fatstomached little brownies trying to cling to a fence, and nearly all the children clapped their hands. Martin sat stiff in his seat. It maddened him. He could not put his thought to words yet it was so real that it made him tremble.

As the picnic luncheon progressed, he watched Mr. Sterrett smiling and eating, now and then catching a phrase or so of his conversation. Mr. Sterrett talked a great deal. He used his hands when he spoke, not for gestures, but for gripping the listener by the arm or in some manner touching him. He touched nearly everyone he addressed, men, women and children. Little boys he would pat on the head; big boys he would take by both shoulders, varying this with a combination caress that involved gripping their right hand with his right hand and placing his left hand on their upper arm or shoulder. In the case of girls and women he would take one or both their hands, and, making a kind of closed hammock of his palms, hold them thus while he spoke.

Because he was seated he could not do this now; but

Martin heard, and the voice had the same maddening note the music teacher's had:

"Well, folks and children, we'll be calling it a day soon. Pretty near time for all good people to pack up snacks and go home. We've all had a bully time—glorious weather, mighty interesting talks and games, a great day in the open, clean and wholesome right under God's blue sky. . . ."

As he nearly always did when Mr. Sterrett spoke, Martin lowered his eyes. He looked up again because the voice had stopped. Mr. Sterrett had risen and was walking rapidly toward the river with Miss Ross, a teacher. Martin's first thought was that somebody had been drowned. He stood up, looking. Everybody stood up.

Some of the picnickers, teachers and boys and girls, followed the pair; but Martin stepped back and moved beside a tree, where he picked up a dead limb and began breaking it. It snapped easily, but not in two. It was tough and stringy, like hemp; and Martin twisted it around and around as though vastly absorbed, and he was still doing this when the posse came up the slope.

Miss Ross, her mouth set queerly, was in the lead, and at her side and a little behind her was a girl of about Martin's age. Her legs were bare, and brown, like a brown egg, and as she walked she placed her small bare feet fastidiously; her tongue out between her teeth. In her left hand she clutched her shoes and stockings. Her cheeks were scarlet, but she held her head defiantly.

Martin stood very still. They were coming toward him, toward his tree. His hands tightened on the broken limb. They were stopping near the tree on the river side, away

from him. They had stopped, apparently unaware of his presence. His breath came fast. Something terrible had happened: The girl was Vada Sanderson, who sat in the room across from his at school. In the hall and through the open schoolroom door he had watched her often and intently, but had never spoken to her. She brought bright red maraschino cherries to her teacher. This was because her father was a saloon keeper. He owned The Stag, Carrolton's biggest bar, and he had only one hand, and he was also the town gambler. From his mother, and from others, Martin had heard these things vaguely, just as he had heard that Vada had no mother.

He almost held his breath as Miss Ross flung round on the child and spoke. Her voice came sharply: "What did you take your drawers off for?"

"Because I wanted to," said Vada. "I was wading."

Miss Ross laughed a dry laugh. "Uh-huh. And what became of the boy who ran? Who was he?"

No answer came. Miss Ross faced about and looked down toward the river. "Oh, Mr. Sterrett," she called. "Mis-ter Ster-rett."

Mr. Sterrett was coming as fast as he could. But first he must shoo the other children back. They had halted, silent, strange looks on their faces.

Miss Ross spoke in a low voice as Mr. Sterrett joined her. "She won't tell who the boy was." Miss Ross grew red, lowering her voice still more, "She had these off."

"How's that?" Mr. Sterrett touched the under-side of his moustache with his red tongue. To Martin it seemed that he was smiling. He continued to smile as he gazed fixedly at Vada. "Why won't you tell, Vada?" His voice was smooth.

Vada raised her eyes, They were a deep brown, and large; for the moment, it seemed to Martin, too large. The color had drained from her cheeks, "Because I don't know. And I wouldn't tell if I did. I was in wading alone, and he came in too,"

Mr. Sterrett cleared his throat and exchanged glances with Miss Ross. "Well, Vada. . . ." His red tongue glistened. He took a step toward her and stopped. He extended an arm toward Miss Ross. "Let me see," he said softly; and his fingers spread apart to take the small garment that she held.

Again Martin stood very still: He could not help but see: Mr. Sterrett's arm was poised, and Vada was bending over, the front of her dress raised slightly, and twisted, in both hands. For an instant it seemed to Martin that she was doing this in agony, and then Vada raised her eyes and her body stiffened. "Give me those," she said grimly; and she snatched them from Miss Ross's hands.

Mr. Sterrett stood back, his lips parted, his smile gone. But his face was very red. "Well," he said. . . . "Well!"

Martin wanted to laugh. Vada's defiance gave him a tremendous feeling of satisfaction. She had wanted to do something and having done it she was not going to cringe or apologize or, explain, nothing. She became in a flash a symbol.

He looked hard at Mr. Sterrett. Mr. Sterrett was smiling once more in that way of his. Vada was for him a symbol. He called her Women. "Women," used synonymously with Vice, was going to be his specialty in the years to come.

But of course Martin did not know this when he went home from the picnic that day.

III

Martin sat with his mother in her phaeton down-town. They had stopped in Main Street almost opposite The Stag. "There's Jim Sanderson," said his mother quietly. She pointed swiftly with her gloved fingers, then let her hand fall in her lap.

Martin looked. Jim Sanderson. He stood near the curb under a sort of wooden awning. It was shady there and cool. He had coal black hair and he wore a soft white shirt with a pleated bosom. His grey eyes seemed cool too, and he looked so clean.

"A romantic gentleman gone wrong," said Martin's mother softly. "Too bad about that pretty child."

She laughed suddenly and clucked to the horse as though ashamed of what she had said.

Martin had just turned twelve when this occurred; and a few months later his father's bank failed. Shortly after this the family moved. The bank having failed, moving, so his father said, was the sensible thing to do. In the four years that followed his father tried insurance and then real estate and then the stock brokerage business, and finally—just promoting.

The house was sold; the family kept moving, and Martin's mother seemed to wilt. With each successive move she sold or stored more furniture until only three or four old chairs and some daguerreotypes remained. After the chairs had been stored and the daguerreotypes carefully wrapped in tissue paper and put away, she died.

Jim Sanderson, with his daughter, Vada, remained in Carrolton and continued to wear his white pleated-bos-

omed shirts and to stand in the shade beneath the wooden awning, or at the far end of The Stag's bar. He stood as though posed, one arm, the left, half behind his back. There was no hand on this arm, but a little nubbin with which, when he chose, he could nuzzle a whiskey glass to him with great grace, as a hockey player handles a puck. But he was very sensitive about it, and he did this only when drinking with intimate friends. The hand was gone because it had been amputated after a shooting affair years ago sometime, possibly when he was still a romantic gentleman.

Chapter II

ARTIN LAVERY was nineteen. He sat alone in the drawing room of a Pullman car, and the train was slowly crossing the river. The bridge's diagonal beams flashing by said, Whink, Whink, Whink, not with exclamation points, but quietly.

They were red beams just as they were when he left Carrolton at twelve, and though he saw them whiskingly he saw also their bolts, all even in rows, a series of periods. They occurred that way in some books, Martin reflected, many periods in a row, and they indicated to you whatever your mind was able to see-a scene which the author could not or dared not finish, a gap in life, something incomplete, or so complete that the author, rather beside himself at its completeness, said, "There it is! Look!"

Martin wondered what the bolts meant to him now, for they did seem to have a strangely significant meaning.

He sat thinking, casting, trying this pool and that of his memory, like a fly fisherman. He was conscious of the simile, conscious of the deliberateness of his casting. It pleased him to be conscious of it. It pleased him to be conscious of everything. Suddenly he laughed. . . . Mr. Sterrett, that old fraud. . . . Vada.

The bridge over which the train was passing was only about a quarter of a mile above the Sisters Grove. They had crossed the bridge that day returning from the picnic. Not the railroad bridge but the wagon bridge paralleling it, five hundred feet or so to the north. On it the surrey bearing Martin and four or five other children had stopped, and they had got out and run around a little. Martin had walked along the river bank to a point near the railroad bridge and had stood looking up at the beams. He had counted bolts, winking to record each one; but had grown confused and stopped. In theatres and churches where there were lights above, along arches or in domes, he had done the same thing, this counting, in later life, wondering always why he did so. He hated figures. But he felt relieved now. "I know," he said, "you cast and get nothing, then you change flies and get a rise. . . . These bolts."

He gazed out at the beams again, laughing once more. . . . Vada . . . her slender legs and big brown eyes, a wide-eyed bird, wading and unafraid.

Martin frowned. Such damn fool little things stuck way back in his mind. Thoughts he could not express, images he could never translate to words, emotions of which he dared not speak out loud. "Blubbery emotion," he said, his lips moving. "People who try to tell you how they felt when they saw the American flag suddenly in Turkey. . . . As if they could tell . . . ever. Hell, their feelings are cheap compared to mine, and I don't want to hear them. I don't want to hear my own. Somehow they shame me. My heart's blood, and yet I am afraid." He smiled thinly. "So I shall have to dilute with lies everything I say, always leaving unexpressed what I feel most deeply. And when people ask me how sunsets or music or marching soldiers impress me I shall have to be very gruff about it and say, 'Oh, all right.' And they will think that I am cynical and callous. . . . "

He was depressed. . . . At college they thought he was an atheist and hard. No morals, either: he drank. . . . Lord, if they knew. "I demand sincerity, that's all. . . . Thoughts, words, deeds. Otherwise I paint them with irony, as they should be painted, or I toss them about with flippancy as they should be tossed, or I spear them with cynicism to let out the juices of their hypocrisy. . . . Why not?". . .

Yes, he drank. . . . He was back at college now, in the big room at the Dutch Kitchen. Smoke hung over everything; negro waiters, smiling fatuously, came running in with trays of drinks. Martin smiled. . . . Waiters. . . . I wonder what they think? Young white bucks drinking and calling them George and Sam in a loud voice and pretending to abuse them. . . . Pete Farnam, the crew captain, saying for instance, "You black bastard, if you don't get me that rye highball quick I'll kill vou.". . . And butlers' thoughts, and ladies' maids': and particularly the old fellow who ran the college Turkish bath. They called him Fur Belly, because no one ever saw him except with just a turkish towel around his loins, and the hair on his flabby stomach made a pattern. He should have been sweated down to nothing, but somehow he stayed fat. His thoughts as he rubbed drunk young men, some of whom got sick and who said, "Charge it, Fur Belly," and went weaving up the hill.

Martin recalled a night in the baths. He was sober and he watched the old man at his work. He was a conscientious worker. He rubbed everybody just the same. Thin students, fat students, smooth-skinned students like girls, hairy ones, like apes; fellows who talked and tried to josh Fur Belly as he worked, saying, "Look out for

the old spine, Fur Belly. I need it, so don't break it"; or, "Think my figure's improving, dearie?" And silent fellows who lay flat on their backs or on their stomachs, arms under their heads, eyes open or eyes closed, according to how drunk they were, taking it all as a matter of course, poor old Fur Belly's rubbing them and making great thwopping noises with his cupped palms. . . .

"Good God," thought Martin. "He actually had to learn that; and some day when he felt that he was good at it he was pleased. Perhaps he even spoke to his wife about it, saying, 'I'm rubbing much better these days, Hilda. You should have seen me work to-night. We had sixteen students, only four or five of them real drunk, and five of them paid cash."

Cash! Martin remembered what he had done to Fur Belly. . . . The night he went in with the four fellows. They were the only customers, Fur Belly's business being new then. Fur Belly was delighted. Although he had only the towel around his loins he received them like a head-waiter, . . . That wasn't quite it, because there was no pride or conscious condescension about it. He went slopping around in his bare feet, first out by the desk right under the light, then in the steam room, then at the marble slab where they were rubbed, and finally in the little rooms where he put a sheet and a light blanket over them, much as a mother would. Kid Fraser was drunk. He had given Fur Belly his nick-name. He had called out from his booth, "Say Mart, did you tell old Fur Belly to wake us early? I've got a class at eight o'clock."

Martin got up, possibly an hour later, and went down a little corridor to get a drink of water. The matting hurt his bare feet. It was brown and looked as if it might have been woven of the fibre off a cocoanut.

Fur Belly sat in a new chair by the desk, reading. All he had on was his towel and a hat, but he wore spectacles, the ear pieces wrapped with string. He looked up, smiling. He stood up, all attention, not exactly servile—there was no word for it. You had to see him. The hair on his stomach was gray. Martin felt that as he sat there alone he had been stroking it, twisting a few hairs into a little brush and then smoothing them out again, very carefully.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" asked Fur Belly.

"No thank you. All I wanted was water and I got that," said Martin.

He went back to his cot in the booth. It was some time before he slept. When, in the morning, he went to the desk to pay for himself and his guests, he gave Fur Belly, not money, but a slip of paper. It had worried him fitfully all night. He was a member of the editorial staff of the college humorous paper, a freshman member. The local merchants advertised in the paper; they had to... Fur Belly came, and opened his Turkish bath, and was sandbagged. He took space and gave in lieu of cash a certificate for free baths. A senior, solemnly, had handed it to Martin, his dividends. Fur Belly took it now and looked at it and read his own signature and said. "Oh, yes. . . ."

"Lord," said Martin softly, "it's funny how that makes me sad."

Martin snapped his thread of thought with a vicious cut of desperation. . . . Damn maudlin fool! Idiot!

Weeping over a naked Swede. Very likely he was as happy as a clam; couldn't see himself at all. Martin laughed. So few people could . . . see themselves. They tromped on . . . yes tromped, not tramped, fat and muscle moving without pause . . . crushing flowers, hoofing with a whoop through trailing vines His lips moved, reciting:

WHAT WE FORGET

I used to know a tot of things I didn't know I knew; And if you think a bit, I think, You'll find that you did too.

By merely thumping with my thumb, I read the melon's heart.
I knew a dandy diving trick
That gave my hair a part.

I knew the shortest way of all To reach the swimming hole, The very safest place to hide My new-cut fishing pole.

Columbus of the clearest spring
Was I on woodland march,
The coolest, clearest, deepest spring,
Tucked neath a grapevine arch.

Sweet were your waters as I knelt Upon your dripping brink,

And shamed Narcissus with a grin Before I stooped to drink.

O knowledge of my boyhood days, How shadow-like you crept Into my heart that did not know The secrets that it kept. . . .

He had done this at college, at night, writing with ink in a battered red note-book, composition book, to be exact, the word "Compositions" stamped in big black on the cover. "The damn fools," said Martin. "So many things are spoiled that way.". . .

He closed his eyes and read his verse again. That was spoiled . . . labeled, Sentimental Mush. No wonder Life and Judge and Lippincott's Magazine had sent it back. Columbus was a hard man. He'd wreck a woodland. In that picture where the Indians were kneeling he wore armor. The whole thing was out of drawing. You couldn't tuck a spring; and "march" was shoved in to make a rhyme. . . . School teacher word. "Now children, a brisk march through the meadowland." Martin spoke the words aloud and in a mincing voice.

Hell, he didn't want to be a poet. There was damn little written poetry in the whole world. Those silly things at the bottom of magazine pages. He had read a lot of them. Some had music and occasionally soothing words. . . . Stirring leaves . . . the plumes of wheat . . . but absolutely no logic or horse sense.

Dreamers wrote them, hurling vapid questions at God. . . . Martin set his mouth. As if man had any

right to assume that the universe was made for him. He laughed: God talking, "Just look at those damn things swarm. Hand me that insecticide, will you? Here goes another plague."

Though Martin laughed, he was depressed. He was berating dreamers, and he the worst dreamer of them all. He was all emotion and no guiding intellect. He could never finish anything. . . . Thoughts, thoughts, crazy thoughts. When he tried to concentrate they rushed in on him and knocked him down. When he saw clearest, life broke through and struck him in the face.

He sat pondering. "Let 'em come," he said grimly. "Good God, who's afraid to think!"

He hitched himself close to the car window and lit a cigarette, puffing. He would be home in a few minutes.

. . The train was moving more slowly. . . . Carrolton's scrawny suburbs. Huge real estate signs. . . .

The Dissell Tract—Lots on Easy Terms. Half graded streets, the earth brown and fresh . . . not quite straight lines of newly-planted skinny trees. . . . Rows of black pipe along the roadside, their segments about two feet apart. "Nice sewers for the installment victims," thought Martin. "This was all prairie when I left." He tried to read a sign way off. . . . CARROLTON . . . something. He smiled. "Testing a Giant's eyes. . . . Can you see those letters?" "Well, I see something," said the Giant.

Crazy stuff again. He was always doing that in the lecture room at college, letting his mind run. Rows and rows of fellows took notes, writing rapidly and in many cases with great neatness what the speaker said. But he was not there. . . . Circles of thought, boomerangs,

parabolas, even stranger ones. They writhed and stretched away to infinity and the fourth dimension.

He was depressed again. . . . His most poignant thoughts would always escape him. They boiled, bubbled, worked like maggots. No, they were spray. It touched him, the spray, making him wince, stinging his flesh. . . . What of that? Life stung, but it was good. It was sparkling, vital, perfumed. It danced in the sunlight, crystal clear, iridescent . . . every color and no color. It moved too swiftly for one color to command. No painter could catch the scurrying hues. He would go mad, the painter, as Martin would go mad. It would not stand still. Feverishly he would try this pigment and that, the painter. He would leap at the canvas like an idiot after his shadow. He would stab at the canvas, holding his brush forcibly against it, then raising it carefully, looking. . . . A silly daub. . . . Idiots tried to catch flies that way, made swift passes at them, then very gravely opened their dirty palms. No fly. . . . Martin laughed bitterly and yet happily. He couldn't do it, but the painter couldn't either. No one could. The painter would sit down after awhile, staring at his smears. . . . And they would be smears. Palettes with their massed colors were smears, life unco-ordinated. . . . And finished pictures were often worse. They showed the feebleness of man's effort to depict life.

Yet some day he would sift and weave his thoughts. His thoughts. He would borrow nothing, steal nothing. Everything that was not original he would destroy. "To hell with that. Let them copy me! . . ."

He was smiling as he stood in the Pullman lobby with the bag. He was back home now, back in Carrolton at nineteen, back, because like his father's traveling and promoting, it seemed the sensible thing to do. Here his sister lived and here he could have a home.

"Bring on your thoughts," he said. "I'll lie with them all night in mirrored rooms."

"Carrolton," called the conductor.

Chapter III

ARROLTON, in 1905, which was the year of Martin Lavery's return, had about forty thousand inhabitants. The old depot had been destroyed by a cyclone during his absence, and there was a new union station of brick, with a tower, and a clock so large that from the street you could see the minute hand move. This was almost the first thing Martin noticed when he got off the train, the moving minute hand.

"I am glad I have been away nearly eight years," he said, "because I can see how the town has moved also.
... It will be like seeing a girl at nine and then, suddenly, at nineteen..."

He got on a street car near the station to go to the house where his sister lived. He watched the street car conductor. His blue suit was shiny, especially the coat sleeves around the cuffs. Back in the first, second and third grades at the Fourth Ward School where, as a child, Martin had gone, common boys used to wipe their noses on their sleeves. They left shiny streaks. They also spat on their slates. He remembered his first commencement, June, 1892. He was seven years old. Miss Jenny Erskine was his teacher. He brought her flowers, pink roses from his mother's garden. Giving them to her he suffered tremendous embarrassment. He watched them on her desk during all the exercises. They were in a slender glass vase and he was torn alternately by the

thought that the vase would tip over or that Miss Jenny would pick up one of the roses and smile down on it as women had a way of doing and then smile down at him. He could reconstruct it all very clearly, the room, with the windows open, Miss Jenny's desk, the blackboard with the erasers in little troughs in which there were deposits of powdered chalk, the water bucket on a chair near the door . . . everything. One thing, though, stood out above all the rest. There was a little boy who sat near Martin who smelled. He had on a new suit that day, Commencement Day. It was a queer brown. When the little boy came up to Miss Jenny's desk, as all the children had to do in turn, Martin noticed as he stood there that the tags were still on the suit. All of them. Martin wanted to cry. The little boy's mother had not known enough to take the tags off. Worse. She had purposely left them on so that the school might see that her son had on a new suit.

"This is queer," Martin said to himself. "I am digging way back for incidents where I felt sorry for people over little things. I wonder why that is? I don't dig either, they come." He pondered. The little boy and the tags on his suit, waiters taking orders, saying nothing, Fur Belly with his towel around him. . . . "I know," he said suddenly, "life mocks these people and they don't know it. It mocks me too, but I know it. It will always mock me, and I will always know it, which means that my tragedy is greater than all theirs."

He was getting off the street car now, and he spoke harshly to himself: "You ass," he said, "who's done anything to you!"

II

His sister was sitting in the front room in a rocker. sewing. Martin had telegraphed the time of his arrival. vet he felt that she would not be at the train. This would not be because she did not love him but because there would be things to do around the home. She had been married about a year, and she took married life seriously. She was doing light housekeeping, sharing a small dwelling with a music teacher. The music teacher, whose name was Miss Henderson and who drove about seeing her pupils in an old phaeton drawn by an older white horse, lived in the bedroom on the right of the hall, and Martin's sister, with her husband, occupied the one on the left. The rest of the house, bathroom, a small parlor, the kitchen, they shared. This was easy because of the different hours the two households kept. Miss Henderson would get up about seven and dress quickly and start her rounds. People would ask her to stay for lunch. They always did. Everybody seemed to feel that Miss Henderson needed nourishing food. It was understood that, except when invited to lunch, Miss Henderson ate crackers and drank tea. She gave this impression. Her thin white horse suggested it, the way she played the scales suggested it. . . . Miss Henderson was ageless. She had a great deal of saliva.

Martin's sister and her husband got up later, about nine. The sister liked to get up earlier, but the husband, who was a lawyer, did not. He was tall, well-built, and slow in speech and movement. He was a professional Southerner in looks. Especially his hair suggested this. . . .

But the thing to do now was to tell his sister why he had left college. She had helped him with her money, and he had busted out. He had been flunked. His class was 1907 and here he was at home, in 1905, in February of his sophomore year. There was tragedy in this, his coming home, and in his having used his sister's money. And yet it did not stir him much. Martin thought, "I gloss over the big things that should worry me and cling to the little ones. By rights I should be very depressed over this home-coming. It is really terrible. I could look in on it, or down on it, and see it, but from within I can only see that I am justified."

He could put it this way to her: He could explain how, in the mechanical drawing class, he sat next to a Japanese. They were drawing a cross-section of a machine. Measurements had to be exact, lines exact. Everybody had a blue print. You measured with a metal ruler and transferred the measurements to your drawing, which was done on a big sheet of white paper fastened at the four corners by thumb tacks to a wooden board like a bread board. Martin looked over at the Jap's drawing. It was perfect, lines straight and beautiful, no smudges, no erasures. . . . He looked down at his own drawing. . . . He had not even fastened his paper down properly. There was ink on it, and smudges. Lines started off being thin and became fat; some of them even slanted. "I could say," thought Martin, "that that was why I knew I was not cut out for an electrical engineer. But I won't do that. If I could do it in one sentence and she could see it instantly and laugh it would be the best way. But in her case I must not do it. In the case of most people in life I must not do it. I shall have to make

my explanations rather laboriously and therefore rob them of their spontaneity and inject hypocrisy into them. I am going to do that now when I tell sister why I left college. I shall have to omit every *real* cause in order to give her reasons which her mind can grasp. And that does not mean that she is stupid."

He explained; and he saw the disappointment in her eyes as he spoke: He was not good at mathematics. He began to hate it at prep school when he came to trigonometry. Even now, a sophomore from an engineering school, he did not know what sine and co-sine meant. He never would know, he never wanted to know. He flunked analytics in the first term at college and again in the second term. He took it at summer school and again flunked it. He took it the first term of his sophomore year, having memorized most of the problems, and finally, to get rid of him, they gave him sixty, the lowest passing mark.

It was the same way with shop-work. You made things on lathes, at first wooden vases which, when you finished them, you varnished while they revolved rapidly. His vases were awful. They were swollen and lumpy and not at all according to measurements. He varnished only a few. Most of them he kept doing over. Each one contradicted the other. They were like his thoughts, which he did over and over, never getting the measurements right . . . polishing only a few while they revolved rapidly. He did not say this to his sister. He concluded: "It seemed plain that I wouldn't make an engineer. Frankly, I wasn't interested and I guess I became demoralized. I quit going to classes. I used to sit

up late, sometimes all night, writing junk, and sleep late, sometimes till afternoon. I was rotten. . . ."

"No you weren't rotten," objected his sister. "You are just lazy and careless and you don't think. . . ." She tried hard to be cheerful and fair about it. She continued: "You must forget it now and settle down and make something of yourself. It'll be a come-down, I know, after college, but you ought to take a business course, learn shorthand and stenography."

Martin thought of stenographers. They were young men who used key rings and who took pride in sharpening pencils. He did not think of women stenographers because then, in Carrolton, few women were stenographers. Many young men started that way, however, in banks and railroad offices, and stories were told of how some of them became railroad presidents. But Martin knew that he would never be a railroad president or a bank president. There was no doubt of this whatever, because he did not want to be.

But he could not explain this to his sister. She would not understand why he did not want to be a railroad president. Also it would be impossible to make her see that, sincerely, he was not interested in just working, getting on. He had to have a keen desire. He said this, out loud, and to his relief she laughed. He said: "Sis, I haven't a keen desire for that sort of thing. You know that." She continued laughing. She said, "You've always said that, Martin. Do you know it? You said it as a little boy. When you didn't want to do anything you said, 'But I haven't a keen desire.'"

He was pleased. "I'm going to get a job on a newspaper," he said. "I'm going to be a reporter."

"Then you've got a keen desire for that?"

"I think I have. Tell me, does Jim Sanderson's daughter, Vada, still live here?"

"I guess so. Why? She's been off to a convent, I think. Why do you ask that?" said his sister.

"I just thought of it, that's all," said Martin....
"She used to go to the Baptist Sunday school, and to the picnics, and I just happened to think of her."

"They say she's pretty," his sister said. "She doesn't go around much. She couldn't. Jim Sanderson's rich now, but he's still a gambler, and he stays around the Stag Saloon. . . . You don't drink, do you, Martin?"

"Well, I'm not a souse. I like drinking."

His sister looked up at him. "Don't disappoint us all, Martin," she said. "Don't dissipate."

Martin thought: "How arbitrarily they use that word. It means to them, women, drinking, pool rooms." He thought of Dick Burtis. His mother had frequently talked about Dick Burtis. He came of a fine family but he "dissipated." Finally a man hit him in the mouth with a billiard ball, knocking out nearly all his front teeth.

He said to his sister, "Don't worry about me. I'm not going to be any Dick Burtis."

Chapter IV

OHN JAYNE SCOTT occupied a cubby hole in a corner of the city room of the Carrolton Evening Star. The cubby hole had been built for him, set down as it were like a packing box with one side knocked off, and varnished vaguely. It had no door, and the sides did not reach the ceiling. Thus it neither shut out the noise nor afforded privacy, and there was no reason for it except that it gave Mr. Scott a place to be City Editor in. He had a desk in it, a roll-top desk literally crammed with papers; and on the walls were several hooks on which clippings were impaled. Most of these were dusty and some of them were yellow. At some time or other there was design in their segregation and impalement but the fact that they were still there and dusty and yellow seemed to indicate that this design had been forgotten. It was the same way with most of the stuff that Mr. Scott had in or on his desk. Reports, and that sort of thing. The pigeon-holes were full of them. They had facts in them, statistics of all kinds, and legislative data and what not. When he would look over a new arrival Mr. Scott would invariably find something interesting and would file it away. For a time, when he first became City Editor and when the cubby hole was new, there was system in his filing, but now there was not. He shoved things in wherever they would go, and to do this he had to bend them, breaking small books' backs and folding

larger documents in strange ways. In some of the pigeon-holes they were jammed so tight that it was difficult to get them out. Mr. Scott had abandoned all pretense at system at this stage, and many things that used to be filed were just tossed on the desk. . . . Some day he was going to clean everything out.

Martin sat in the doorway of the cubby hole, talking to Mr. Scott. He had pulled a chair up and sat across the threshold. Mr. Scott had just given him a job. He had had to consult the owner of the paper to do this, but he did not tell Martin so. He had given him the job, and he was talking about it. He liked to talk about the newspaper business. He was a professional newspaper man. This does not mean that Mr. Scott necessarily regarded journalism as a profession, although very likely he did, but that he made a profession, not of his craft but of his being of the craft. He was like a professional Southerner or a professional Irishman with the difference that where they spoke of family or country Mr. Scott spoke of what he had done in the newspaper business and of what he would do if he had the chance.

It seemed that there was some sort of a restriction which prevented Mr. Scott ever doing just what he had in mind. Martin also gathered that there were two kinds of newspaper men in the world, "good newspaper men" and the others. Mr. Scott did not precisely define the attributes or the qualifications of either, yet it was plain that he regarded himself as being pre-eminently of the first class. In the second class, although Mr. Scott did not say this either, came the managing editor of the *Star* and the owner of the paper. There were a few reporters on the paper who showed promise of attaining to the first class.

They had been employed by Mr. Scott and under his tutelage they were going to develop into good newspaper men. It was a hard fight, though, Martin gathered, because of the unfortunate connection with the paper of the managing editor and the owner. They were Northerners.

"So you see," said Mr. Scott, although these were not his words, "you are a young fellow just out of college, and I am giving you a chance under me to make good in the newspaper game." He used that word. "It is a great game," he continued. "You will run into many obstacles and nearly always there will be an incompetent managing editor to circumvent and very likely also a publisher who doesn't know what he wants, but nevertheless if you do as I do you will make a good newspaper man."

"His predicament is something like mine," Martin reflected. "He wants to do things and something stops him. He has zeal and convictions and ambition and yet something stops him. . . . It is possible that the owner and the managing editor think he is an old fraud. Maybe he is. It is quite possible also that I am a fraud. Anyway, a good way to find out is to go into this business. Here I can learn life. I should want to kick anybody else who went around saying he wanted to learn life, but to myself I can say it."

Mr. Scott was still talking. Something in the look in Martin's eyes caused him to stop. "He is wondering," thought Martin, "what my measurement of him is. He is small, but even if he is small I can like him if he is earnest and honest. I use those words loosely. As a matter of fact I rather dislike earnestness, as, for example, fellows who go on debating teams. . . . I suppose I do

like honesty. I think I am honest, although of this I am not sure. I am not sure that I am becoming a reporter because I have a keen desire for the business or whether I am doing it so that I may wallow where I please. It is probably a little of both. . . . Some day I shall write a book. It is unquestionably true that I have a keen desire to do something like that. . . ." He looked at Mr. Scott. "I'll bet he thinks he can write a book."

Mr. Scott was not quite through with himself. If Martin's attention had wandered for a moment that was all right. Most everybody's attention did that when he talked, and Martin was still sitting there. "I covered the great Halverton flood," said Mr. Scott abruptly. "I was the first honest-to-God newspaper man to get into the town. There were a few dubs there and they tried to get out the stuff but it was too big for them. It stunned them. I wrote seventy-one hundred words without a break except for coffee and whiskey. Every big paper in the North carried my story, without a word changed, and The Associated Press carried most of it."

From somewhere, Martin could not see where, Mr. Scott produced a clipping. It was not a clipping, it was a full page. It had been folded and refolded until it fell into place, or apart, like a map, and the folds had broken along the ridges like a soiled old letter of recommendation.

As Mr. Scott spread it out on a bare spot of his desk and said, "Here is my story. I happened to run across this copy the other day," Martin stood up and looked over his shoulder. He thought, "I know this man now. This alone of all the things he has done as a real newspaper man has given him a real thrill. It is getting farther and farther away each year. For a while he could use it in his quarrels with managing editors, and he could apply for jobs on it, saying casually, 'You may recall that I reported the Halverton flood.' . . . And now he can do two things with it: show it to cub reporters and strangers and get drunk with it."

He said to Mr. Scott, forcing the words out, "That's great. . . . What paper was that in?"

"The St. Louis Post Dispatch," said Scott.

Martin was thinking: "Funny how he produced that from nowhere. He must have had it all folded up in his hand, waiting. Or maybe he was sitting on it."

"It might interest you to read it sometime," said Mr. Scott.

"Oh, certainly," said Martin. He reflected, "He is hurt because I don't read it now, but I shan't."

Apparently Mr. Scott had been disappointed this way before. With sudden briskness he said, "Tell me something about yourself." He did not italicize "yourself," but Martin did so for him in translation, and he did wait for Martin to begin.

"I knew your father," said Scott.

"Yes, I know you did." "He really wants to talk some more himself," thought Martin. "I shall merely answer his questions, and he can sandwich in what he pleases between."

"What's your father doing now?" asked Scott.

"He's in New York. He's a promoter. . . ." "There is no other word for it," reflected Martin. "He is a promoter. It is like saying that he is an actor. If he is a good actor people will smile and say, 'Interesting profession.' If he is not a good actor they will simply smile."

"Yes, I knew him years ago," continued Scott. "He's

a fine man, and it was too bad when the bank failed. But reverses come to all of us."

Martin got up. "Then I come to work Monday," he said. "To-day's Friday."

"Eight o'clock Monday morning," said Scott, rising and extending his hand.

Martin thanked him and started for the stairway. The Star's city room was one flight up. Scott walked to the head of the stairs with him. "On your way out, if I were you, I'd stop and see Lemp a minute. Just introduce yourself and shake hands. He's the Managing Editor. Not that it makes any difference, but I would, if I were you. He isn't a bad sort when you know him. But he has a whole lot to learn about the newspaper business."

Lemp sat at a desk on the main floor of The *Star* Building. There was no partition around it. It was in a corner of the composing room, almost among the linotype machines.

Martin stood by the desk until he looked up. He was a pale man, tall, and northern looking. Martin catalogued him. "He is earnest. He has more balance than Scott but he is as cold as a street walker. He never takes more than two drinks at a time, and frequently then a horse's neck. He is about thirty, Scott is about forty-five. Lemp will succeed in the newspaper business and get out of it, and Scott will fail and stay in it. . . . Scott has failed. And Lemp will probably fire me. . . . We won't get along."

Lemp pushed back his eye-shade and stood up. "Oh, yes," he said pleasantly as Martin explained who he was. His handshake was limp, his palm moist. Martin had some difficulty in hearing him above the clatter of the

machines. Lemp half shouted, "Did he tell you what your salary was to be? . . . Five dollars a week?"

Martin nodded. Scott had not told him, but he nodded. Lemp walked over toward the door, beckoning Martin to follow. Here there was less noise. "We want you to do baseball," said Lemp. "You're a college man, interested in sports, you ought to be good at it."

"I'm not really a college man," said Martin. "I busted in my sophomore year. I used to live here and I've just got back. You couldn't call me a college man, though. I took engineering and quit that. I'm not anything."

"What did you quit for?" asked Lemp. "Sizing me up," thought Martin. "He has labelled me already. He is saying, 'visionary, erratic, won't stick at anything.'"

He looked at Lemp squarely. "I didn't exactly quit. I never got started. When I was about twelve somebody gave me an electric motor. I ran it and later I made some batteries and things. . . . My father thought I would make a good electrical engineer."

He laughed; Lemp laughed. "That will give him something to go on," thought Martin. "Now he will know the kind I am. He thinks he can read character."

"You finished your college course, didn't you, Mr. Lemp?"

"Yes; what made you think so?" Lemp eyed him for a moment.

"I just knew. . . ." "He resents that," thought Martin, "but he can't get his finger on it. It was a fool thing to do. I could arouse him utterly. I could say, 'I'll bet you made Phi Beta Kappa. And probably you worked your way through college. You sold pennants or you had the laundry agency.' He is proud of it, but he doesn't

like to be accused of it. It is like my calling myself a fool. I want to do it myself."

"Most of the early baseball stuff is turned up around the Stag Saloon," Lemp was saying evenly. "I don't suppose you have any scruples against going in a saloon?"

"Fair enough," thought Martin. "I can't put my finger on that either. He has my number fairly well at that."

"Not at all," he said. "That's Jim Sanderson's place, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Lemp. "He's the club owner."

"All right," said Martin. "I'll be on deck Monday morning."

Π

When he left the *Star* building Martin walked on rapidly. He was going to his aunt's house. He was to make his home there for a while. Living with his sister at Miss Henderson's was out of the question. His sister would try, in a way, to regulate his hours and his habits. They would not quarrel, but he would be sullen, or superior and outwardly ungrateful, and she would be sad and depressing. They would worry each other. He would worry about her life and the way it was going and she would worry about his. And, every now and then, she would ask him when he was going to take up stenography.

His aunt was better. She was his mother's sister. He called her Aunt Feddy. Her name was Fielding, Fielding Searle, and "Feddy" was his childhood corruption. She was considerably like his mother. Martin liked to think of her as an aristocrat. He liked to think of his mother as an aristocrat. There was another aunt—there had

been three of the sisters until his mother died-but she was not an aristocrat. She was refined-Martin smiled at the word because it made him think not of refinement but of chorus girls-but she was different from the other sisters. Her name was Ada and she had been a widow as far back as Martin could remember. She was rather pretty and she had two daughters who were pretty. They managed. They were poor, but they managed. The daughters went away to school, and they had things; and as they grew older they visited. They were always visiting. People gave them things. . . . It was like inviting Miss Henderson to lunch. Doing things for Aunt Ada and the two girls was done. Aunt Ada was post-mistress. The President of the United States was a Republican and Carrolton was in a state which went solid for Bryan. Nevertheless Aunt Ada was post-mistress. . . . She held on.

"Strangely," said Martin, "they are sexless women yet men do things for them. Even McKinley and Roosevelt do. The girls will marry well and have children mechanically. And they will continue to have things. They are like nuns who walk in offices collecting alms or those Salvation Army girls who enter saloons. Men can't refuse."

III

Aunt Feddy was sitting out on the side-porch in a rocker when Martin came up. She, too, was a widow but not a professional one. Her husband, a brilliant lawyer, had drunk himself to death. He left a large estate and a cluster of anecdotes that had crystallized into truth.

"Well, Martin, did you get your job?"
"Yes, ma'am."

"Don't say 'yes, Ma'am,' say just 'yes.' If you must say it, say 'Yes, Madam,' or 'Yes, Aunt Feddy.' But 'yes' is enough for anybody. I should have thought you would have learned that in the East."

Martin was rather startled, and pleased. He laughed. "I didn't think much about it," he confessed.

"And I reckon you still say 'Miz' for 'Mrs.'," said his aunt.

"I guess I do," said Martin. "And you say 'reckon' for 'guess'."

Aunt Feddy laughed. "That's a little different. 'Reckon' is all right as I use it. It's Southern. 'Guess' is Yankee for the same thing. But for a grown person to go around saying 'Yes, Ma'am' is like a nigger. It's servile. It's all right for children and negroes but not for grown people. And you're grown now."

Martin noted her use of "nigger" and "negro" a few words apart. "Like a nigger" was all right, because it was expressive. Used otherwise, gentlewomen and gentlemen said "negro" or "darky." Only Northerners got mixed up about it. Martin thought: "Aunt Feddy has a good mind. That was nice shading. She has suggested to me in one sentence that she appreciates how words should be used, and she has said plainer than in words that she expects me to be more than a small-town boy. Moreover, she has said that I am grown. She knows my age exactly, nineteen years and one month. She is the last of my mother's good family. She has mother's brains, but not her quickness of perception nor her depth of emotion. . . . Aunt Ada is her full sister but Aunt Ada

is like another breed. She talks good family, Aunt Feddy lives it. Aunt Ada is a chromo on a gilt tripod in a corner of the parlor at which they point, saying, 'That was my great-great-grandmother.' Aunt Feddy is a daguerreotype in a small black case. Aunt Ada is the Confederate conscript blustering at Robert E. Lee Post U. C. V. of what he did at Gettysburg; Aunt Feddy walks down the street with one empty sleeve pinned up and people say, 'There goes the old Colonel.' . . ."

His aunt was looking hard at him. She said presently,

"Tust what is this you're going to do, Martin?"

"I'm going to be a reporter on the Evening Star, Aunt Feddy."

"An ordinary reporter?"

"Maybe not so damn ordinary."

His aunt did not smile. "What does your sister think of it?"

"Oh, all right, I guess. We haven't talked about it much."

"And your father?"

"I haven't written him yet. But it will be all right with him, too."

"Is he still in New York?"

"I think so. He is interested now in a compressed air device that opens and closes gates at railroad crossings. It also operates switches. Passing trains press down a little nubbin beside the rail and pump the air."

"That sounds practicable," she observed. "Won't he make some money out of it?"

"No," said Martin. . . . "He is also interested in a machine for making bricquettes . . . little bricks of fuel of powdered coal waste."

"That sounds practicable, too. That may make him some money."

"No, it won't," said Martin. "None of them will. Neither the telephone over which three people can talk on the same wire, nor his coal property, nor the machine for drying vegetables."

"You are a pessimist, Martin."

"No, I'm not, Aunt Feddy. . . ." He looked up at her gravely. "I know, that's all. He doesn't know anything about these things. He reads clippings. He educated himself that way, by reading clippings. He loves them. He loves me, too . . . but all he knows about me is . . . clippings. . . ."

Suddenly and almost uncontrollably Martin wanted to cry. He bent his head forward so that she might not see his face. He was sitting on the porch steps, in front of and a little to the side of her.

"I wish your mother had lived," said Aunt Feddy. . . . She paused. "Look up at me," she directed, raising her voice a little.

Martin looked up. "You're crying. There are tears in your eyes," she said. "Come over here and stand by my chair. . . ."

"I'm glad to see you cry, Martin," she said, stroking his hand. "Will you do something for me?" She looked up. Martin noticed that her eyes were dry.

"I guess so," he faltered. He began wiping his eyes with his free hand. He was growing a little panicky. This was not like Aunt Feddy. . . . She so seldom slopped over. . . . And it was not like him.

"I am not going to ask you to make any foolish promises," said his aunt. "Nothing about women or

liquor. I simply want you to tell me as nearly as you can why you cried. . . . What moved you?"

Martin sat down again. Whatever he said he would say calmly. He would try to be honest but he would not blubber. He sat awhile.

"Well," he began, "I think what stirred me most was the gulf between father and me. To me his clippings are tragic. They satisfy him. He has envelopes full of them. He culls them from every imaginable source, and to him they are the word of God. . . . That sounds so mean. It is as though I were making fun of him. But you see, he accepts those little things and I, I can't accept anything. Aunt Feddy, I think I am an atheist. . . ." He must stop now; there was danger of his becoming maudlin. . . .

"And then what?" said his aunt. Her voice was placid.
"Well, I know we can never understand each other,"
he went on. "When we are together I am mean to him.
I love him, but I cut him terribly. He doesn't do that to
me. He is patient. It saddens him, but he thinks I will
change. He thinks it is pig-headed youth. But I won't
change, Aunt Feddy. You know that. I isn't youth.
It's me!"

"And what else?" Aunt Feddy's voice was still placid. "I think a great deal about my mother," said Martin. "It pleases me to believe that I am like her. To me she was wonderful. I want to be wonderful and therefore I keep telling myself I am like her."

"That's not wrong," said his aunt.

Martin smiled gratefully. "No, that isn't," he said slowly, "but many things I have done and shall do are wrong. Things I think, things I do. Things I shall always do . . . probably." He raised his eyes and looked

steadily at his aunt. "I remember exactly what she said to me on her death-bed."

"So do I," said Aunt Feddy. "I was there, right beside you."

"She said this," said Martin. "She said: 'God keep my boy sweet and pure.' . . . How can I be, Aunt Feddy, and be myself?" He stood up, walked to the edge of the porch.

His aunt called to him. "Come back here, Martin."

"I wasn't going," he said, turning about. He came part way back, stood facing her, hands behind his back.

"There's nothing the matter with you," said Aunt Feddy. "Quit thinking about yourself. Your mother didn't want you to be a sissy. If you want to do a thing bad enough, do it. But don't brood. Fight for yourself and your ideals . . . quit analyzing."

"I haven't any ideals," Martin winced at the hypocrisy of this. . . . If anybody had said it to him. . . .

His aunt began rocking. She laughed a little. "That's a lie, Martin. But it's all right. People who go round explaining what their ideals are haven't any as a rule. . . . I meant principles."

"I haven't any principles."

"That's enough!" Aunt Feddy stopped rocking. "Look here," she said. "I don't care for that. That's snivelling. You want me to cry over you, to say, 'Oh, my little nephew' or, 'Why, Martin, you have splendid principles. We all have.' Well, I shan't! If you haven't any principles I'm sorry for you. If you have, keep your mouth shut and fight for them. Don't go whining around."

Martin felt tremendously ashamed. He thought:

"That is just what I should have said to a freshman who went around apologizing for getting drunk. I would want to kick him. She would like to kick me. I ought to be kicked. . . ." He wanted to tell her so. . . . He said, "I mean it's hard to get your finger on them, principles. They shift so. Every time I think, they shift. . . ." "That is nearly true," he reflected.

"Great Lord, why shouldn't they?" exclaimed his aunt. "You don't want to stop thinking, do you?"

"I'd like to think in a straight line."

"No, you wouldn't. That's just the way you don't want to think. You want to think how you please, when you please. . . . I almost said where you please, but that wouldn't make any sense. . . ."

"That sounds like a man, a tolerant man," thought Martin. "It sounds like me, although I am not sure I am tolerant. . . ."

Aunt Feddy was speaking again. Her voice had another sound. "It isn't women, is it, Martin?"

"Lord, no." Martin's face grew red. "You're not going to be a libertine?"

"Certainly not." He felt easier. "Libertine" was a tribute to his understanding, his worldliness. "She is trying to make it as mannish as she can," he thought. "But she is a woman now. She can't hide it."

"Read pretty broad books, don't you, Martin?"

"I guess maybe I do, Aunt Feddy."

"As for example?"

Martin hesitated. He could not trust himself to headlong association of ideas. He began picking. . . . "This is dishonest," he reflected. . . . He was embarrassed.

"Name a few," said Aunt Feddy.

"Well, Tom Jones. . . . Other things of Fielding's, Amelia. . . Some of George Moore . . . De Maupassant . . . Gautier . . . Daudet . . . Zola, some . . . " He stopped. . . .

"And Balzac," said Aunt Feddy with a sort of chant, "which means the Droll Stories, and the Decameron, and by Daudet you mean Sappho, and Rabelais." She stopped; she began laughing. She asked suddenly: "Did you read them for smut or did you read them because they were literature? Did you read Tom Jones because it was the first English novel or because it appealed to the coarse side of you?"

"Both," said Martin promptly and with emphasis.

"That's just why I read them," announced Aunt Feddy. They both laughed.

She eyed him seriously. "But you don't read those things they sell on trains—none of that stuff."

"Lord, no. Why, Aunt Feddy, I'm nineteen. . . . I never did."

She changed the subject abruptly. . . . "And you're going to be interested in this newspaper work. You want to do it . . . you've got a 'keen desire.' That's your phrase, Martin. When you were a little fellow and we woke you in the morning, you said, if you happened to be sleepy, 'I'll get up, but I haven't a keen desire to.'"

Martin wanted to throw his arms around her. "She understands," he thought. "I want my wife like that." He said, "I will, Aunt Feddy. I'll do something. . . . That means nothing," he reflected. "But she understands."

His aunt got up and came and stood on the steps beside

him. "You're to stay here with me as long as you feel like it," she said. "You needn't pay any board now. Later you can. But I reckon your salary won't be much."

"Five dollars a week."

"And you do what for that?"

"I think I'm going to report baseball first."

"I don't like that," said his aunt. "But it's a start, I suppose. . . . " She turned to go into the house. "I shan't bother you but I wish you would get interested in a nice girl. Why don't you call on Madeline Wynne? She's pretty and she's smart. They're splendid people, the Wynnes. Her father was one of your Uncle Martin's best friends." . . .

Madeline Wynne. . . . Martin was at dancing school. He was about seven. His mother sat with other mothers along the side of a room. The floor was polished. He kept running over to her, complaining that his stockings would not stay up. His mother laughed and pushed him away. She was like Aunt Feddy. . . . He danced. The dancing teacher was a man, very thin. He wore a dress suit, although it was daytime. He was always eating Sen-Sen.

"But they won't stay up," Martin was saying to his mother. His mother was pushing him gently, talking meanwhile to the woman next to her.

"Don't think so much about yourself," said his mother. "Go and ask Madeline Wynne to dance with you. . . ."

Only very dimly could he see Madeline now. Yellow curls, thin legs. She had no eyes, no body.

"How old is she?" he asked his aunt as she walked away from him.

"Oh, about fifteen or sixteen or seventeen."

"Too young for me," Martin reflected. "What could we talk about?" To his aunt he said, "I'll drop around there some day. Much obliged, Aunt Feddy."

Chapter V

UNT FEDDY'S reckoning that Madeline was "fifteen or sixteen or seventeen" reminded Martin of the way his Uncle Martin used to make appointments to meet someone down town. "I'll be at the Mansion House about five or six," he would say. Dressing to-day, Sunday, in his room at Aunt Feddy's, Martin thought about it. Her age interested him; he hoped seventeen was right. As a rule numerical approximations were sufficient; he disliked people who measured anything carefully . . . or untied bundles. His father untied bundles and saved string, making neat coils like lariats, which he put somewhere. Martin tore open bundles or squeezed one end of them and slipped the strings off still tied. He tore open letters, often tearing their contents also. Paper cutters, key rings, purses, small note-books, watches, anything that required methodical usage, annoved him.

He bought nothing in quantity, planned nothing. He expected others to supply him matches and cigarettes. At college he borrowed neckties, underwear, socks, razors, silk hats, money, swimming trunks, and, occasionally, whole suits of clothes. He borrowed lecture notes. A stenographer could take notes, Martin Lavery wasn't going to do it. He couldn't compete with fellows who went in for that sort of thing and he wouldn't try.

"Perhaps if I could do it, it would please me," he told

himself. "But as I can't I shall try to shove it out of my nature entirely. I shall concentrate on whatever I can do best. I must be unusual. The rest doesn't matter. Just now I am unusual only in the fierceness of my desire to be unusual. I must be careful, however, to be patient and tolerant with others who do not feel as I do. They are patient and tolerant with me. They accept my shortcomings pleasantly. They help me, almost eagerly. I have noticed that in many ways they treat me like a child. . . . My helplessness in certain things emphasizes their talents, and they are pleased. . . . They do not know that I regard them as children, and yet I think they do. They are afraid of me, although afraid is not the word. They stand poised, ready to say, 'I knew all along he would go to hell,' or, 'I knew he had something in him, but it was hard to tell what. . . . However, I expected this."

Martin thought of these things as he dressed, and of the Wynne family. . . . They lived in a big house on Sumner Street. Martin remembered that it was painted red and brown, that there was an iron fence around the lawn, with sharp points, like spears, and that in spots the lawn was yellow. There the grass had been cut too close. Martin sometimes shaved too close in spots, slicing off the skin. The lawn was like that. . . .

Mrs. Wynne's husband, who was a physician, had died during Martin's absence from Carrolton. Martin remembered him as a big red-faced man with a deep voice. He was not like a doctor. He wore neither a beard nor eye-glasses, and he was a sportsman. Martin had heard his mother say that when Buffalo Bill was in town one time, he and Doctor Wynne, who were old cronies, had a

great time. They both got very drunk in a hotel room, drinking champagne. He had heard in later years that Dr. Wynne frequently got drunk, but his patients loved him and he was prosperous. When he died he left the big house and other property. . . . There were three children: Richard, who chewed tobacco and was goodlooking; Charles, who was big like his father and went hunting a lot, and Madeline. She was the youngest, and the only girl child. . . .

Though it was in February, the day was warm and pleasant. In the absence of northers, February days were likely to be warm in Carrolton. As he dressed, Martin had his windows open. . . . To-morrow he would go to work on the *Star*. To-day he would roam around the town, seeing it, seeing the people, showing off his college clothes. He would like to call on somebody: it might as well be the Wynnes. Madeline would be very immature, but he would go. He was anxious to see what she looked like. . . .

The sun was shining. Martin looked out of the windows. People were walking slowly, and many were out in buggies and surreys. There were a few automobiles in the town, but buggies were the main thing. Rubbertired runabouts were popular. Young men of about thirty especially had them. They ran so noiselessly that, if you did not see the vehicle and heard only the horse's hoofs, you thought of a horseback rider. Through the open windows Martin could hear, "Clack, Clack," near and far. . . . Some of the runabouts had red spokes. Some of the horses were sleek and good-looking. The young men driving them were nearly all dressed in black.

People dressed in black on Sundays. Martin had noticed this in his fraternity house at college. Grays, browns, checks, worn during the week, gave way to somberness on the Sabbath. "And yet God is white," he reflected.

Martin dressed carefully, and in black. He liked the black suit not because it was conventional, but in spite of it. It was a severe college cut and fitted him well. The coat was short, not much below the top of his trousers, revealing practically all of the seat; the shoulders were heavily padded, and at the waist the garment came in sharply, something after the manner of a woman's corsets. . . . The trousers were peg-top, very small at the bottom, and, at the hips, very broad. Had they been white they would not have been unlike a clown's pantaloons. . . . The silhouette was decidedly new in Carrolton. Here and there among the professions in town there was a college graduate; a few Yale men, a Harvard man or two, a considerable smattering of State University men. But Carrolton was not a college man's town; and Martin, carefully dressed and walking down town, was pleasurably aware of it. He was different, and for the moment, exalted. . . . Some day, somehow, he would be different in other ways. He would do something—a book, a play, a terrible piece of self-revelation. He might become a drunkard and write about that; he might eat opium and write about that. It was absolutely necessary that he write about something, and with utter sincerity of feeling. He said, "To me it will be like child-birth. I cannot be like some writers. To them writing is not like child-birth. They lie on broad beds, and it is pleasant. I cannot be like that. I shall go off and have my baby alone. I shall be like a Mexican

Indian who creeps off into the woods and hangs on a limb while in travail. I shall do that. And then possibly I shall kill the child. Just now I am like an old sow. I have litters of ideas, and I eat them all. . . ."

"This is probably half-baked," reflected Martin, "just as most everything I do is half-baked. That is why, probably, I shall kill my child. To me it will seem deformed. But I so hope it won't be. I hope it will be strong and lusty so that I may turn it over and powder it and then hold it up and say, 'Behold my son. You, none of you, thought I could do it, but here he is!'"

II

He walked with his head up and with a swinging gait. He was very different. His hat was of gray felt, crushed flat on top, and adorned with a ribbon of brown and red stripes—his class club colors. He wore no waistcoat. His shirt was a black-and-white stripe. His collar was low, a mere band. Adorning it was a necktie of black silk tied so that the knot was large and bulbous. To achieve this effect Martin had wrapped it about itself three times.

His hair was cut close and parted on the side. Years ago it had been considered "dudish" to part the hair in the middle. Martin had passed through that stage, had parted his hair in the middle, discarded that as passé and had returned now to the side part. The males of Carrolton were just reaching the middle-part stage. And they cut their hair differently. They shaved the neck, leaving a pink-white or a brown-white ring where the

hair had been removed. Martin knew this as a badger haircut. His was cut "down the neck" with no abrupt cleavage. It graduated down to nothing along a graceful hirsute incline.

Martin was aware of all this. His socks, very thin silk, were different. His shoes were different. They were heavy oxfords, real calf, not "box-calf." "Box-calf" was polished; Martin's shoes were shined, required blacking out of an old-fashioned tin box, which smelled pungently. This gave them a dull "gun-metal" finish. Anything but a dull finish was bad. . . . Explaining these canons to anyone Martin would have viewed them in the clear light of their absurdity; exacting conformance to them he did so gravely and without analysis. It was serious business, important and necessary to his being different. While his college clothes lasted he would stand out among his fellows. Like the something he would some day create they would make people turn and say, "That is Martin Lavery."

He called first on his sister, at Miss Henderson's. She was on the front porch, with her husband. They looked clean and calm. He sat down on the porch steps, eight or ten feet away from them, studying his brother-in-law. He knew that he would be wearing a blue serge suit. He knew also that he would be smoking a cigar and that the band would still be on it, and that, handling the cigar, his brother-in-law would employ a deftness that he employed in no other act. Martin watched him: preserving the long ash, holding the cigar now between the thumb and forefinger, now between the index finger and the next one, changing the position carefully as one handling an over-full glass.

His sister rocked. She was content to-day; rocking was purring. Sunday was a blessed gap in life. You ceased struggling then and were not uncomfortable in ceasing. . . . Everybody had on a blue serge suit and it was all right to sit and scrutinize cigar ashes. . . . "I am ridiculing these people for that," thought Martin. "Or possibly I am simply sorry for them. Really I cannot answer. . . . They are not sorry for me. They have only misgivings about me. They think, and everybody I come in contact with all through life will think, that I ignore the little things . . . or sneer at them . . . that I am thinking only of myself. . . And possibly they are right."

III

Sometimes as many as fifteen young men foregathered at Madeline Wynne's on Sunday afternoons. They began coming shortly after dinner-time and kept coming until dark and after. This was a custom in Carrolton, Sunday afternoon calling by young men; and they would go from house to house, singly or in groups. There should be a word here, possibly several words. Bevies, squads, herds, crowds, none of these will do to describe the groups of young men; and similarly there is no word to give you an adequate idea of their act. It was not calling, and it was not courting, and it was not just dropping in.

"The nearest thing to it," thought Martin later, "is deer or cattle going to a salt lick."

Madeline received the young men on the side porch. Except on rainy or raw days, it was her salon. There was a mixture of chairs, those brought out from the house by the young men, nearly always two holding to a chair, while a third held open the screen door; and those that belonged on the porch. These were painted green, and their seats sagged. . . . In the summer a honeysuckle vine nearly enclosed the porch and from it blossoms fell to the floor and were crushed, gold and silver trumpets for a fairy's lips. If no fairy blew them they were not made in vain, for humming-birds came, iridescent, wingless it seemed in their swift flight, and yet not wingless, for they floated poised, vibrant with power, thrusting their little rapiers into the honeysuckle's heart.

"Rapier is not the word," reflected Martin, "for a rapier is not hollow and it suggests death. And these humming-birds do not set out to kill. Their bills are really little hypodermic needles which give and take in synchrony. They leave something, perhaps a delicious anodyne, feeling which the blossom says, 'Oh, that was sweet' and wilts from sheer joy; and they take in return sweet sap and perfume. . . . Only a hypodermic needle is not poetic. . . And sweet sap is a bit too nourishing. It suggests girls too buxom, in tam-o'shanters, and boys who eat red apples, including the core. . . ."

These thoughts as he watched the humming-birds, Martin would think in June. It was February now, and the vines were twisted and brown and there were no blossoms. . . . He went up the front walk, and rang. Mrs. Wynne came to the door. She was smiling automatically, which was an effortless way of welcoming Madeline's callers, only it was necessary every now and then for her to smooth her face out and rest it. But this was automatic, too; and she was not conscious either of the smile or of the relaxing operation, which was done

by stretching the upper lip down over the gums and teeth as one does when the face is chapped.

She did not know him. "How do you do, Mrs. Wynne," he said, and extended his hand, which she took. "I am Martin Lavery and I'm just back from college. Aunt Feddy suggested that I come and see you all."

"Well, Martin! Mighty glad to see you. You had such a sweet mother. We all loved her so. Come in. . . . You must see Madeline. She's out on the porch with her beaux." Mrs. Wynne laughed. "She used to like you at dancing school. . . . She's quite a young lady now, thinks she is anyway. She's nearly seventeen."

"Of course I want to see her," said Martin. "I want to see everybody. You see I've been away so much that I hardly know where to begin."

"How long has it been? How old are you now, Martin?"

"I'm nearly twenty, and I guess it's about eight years."
"Goodness me! You twenty! And has your family been away eight years?"

"Nearly that," said Martin. "It's rather mixed up. You see after the bank failed we went first to Mexico. Then we came back. Then we went East a while, and mother died, and we came back for the funeral; and then I went to prep school. . ." He stopped. Mrs. Wynne was fidgeting. . . "That was childish of me," Martin reflected. "It was like really trying to answer 'How are you?" I should have known better. I shall always say eight years after this and dismiss it. That's the way fellows at college did whose homes were in East Orange or on Long Island. When you asked where they lived they said, 'New York.' . . ."

"You knew that Dr. Wynne was dead." It was a statement rather than a query.

"Yes, I heard it. Sister wrote me. I'm so sorry."

"That will conclude formalities," thought Martin. "I should say something more about him but I can't. I might inquire whether Buffalo Bill sent condolences, but that would be awful. . . ." He thought of Buffalo Bill, riding the gray horse that loped with the regular movement of a rocking chair, riding and breaking brittle glass balls with a rifle, only the cartridges contained tiny shot, not bullets. 'I toss up ideas and break them all the time something like that," thought Martin. ". . Only I wonder if they are ideas, they break so easily, and I guess I cheat, too, with shot."

"Madeline, here's Martin Lavery!"

Martin stood at Mrs. Wynne's side, and a little behind her. He held himself rather tensely, biceps tautened. His jaw was set firmly. . . . He was going to shake hands as they did at college, an underhand swoop and then, with tremendous vigor, a clasp that was at once formal and informal. This handshake was a part of him now and it would not be imitation. It would stamp him as different and yet he would not be faking it. In such things and such things only, things that were impressive and were not consciously imitative, could Martin find pleasure and relief.

Madeline left her chair and came forward giggling. She approached Martin, holding out her hand. "Hello, Martin Lavery," still giggling. "When did you come back to town?"

He gripped her hand, released it quickly and, relaxing his body into a semi-slouch, looked straight into her eyes. "Hello, Madeline," he said with great placidness. "It's good to see you again. . . . You've grown. . . ."

He moved easily toward the porch banister, turned facing her, and spoke to the other callers. There were eight of them. They had risen, and they stood with their hands on chair backs or behind their own backs, tentatively. . . . Martin, leaning forward from the banister rail, shook hands. "Hello there," he said. He knew most of them. . . . For the others he did not wait for introductions.

They sat. Martin perched comfortably on the porch rail... Madeline, in a porch chair in which there were cushions from the house, resumed her place as mistress of her salon... She giggled... She had green-brown eyes. "Tawny," thought Martin, "although that gives you no idea of them at all. Her figure is splendid, a little too developed for seventeen, but splendid.... I wish, though, she wouldn't laugh so much."

She seemed startled when he rose to go within ten minutes. "I'm just calling around," he said easily. "I'll come again soon."

"Nobody asked you to," said Madeline, a quirk on her mouth. She remained seated; the giggles ceased.

"I beg your pardon," Martin stammered...He spoke distinctly, so that all eight callers might hear. "That was cheap of me. You made just the right retort. Let me revise what I said... Maybe I'll come again soon—if you'll let me..." He bowed and moved toward the porch steps where stood several fellows, smoking. He felt small. He paused a moment with them, taking out a box of cigarettes, which he proffered them. "Have a Rameses," he said.

Chapter VI

ARTIN reported early for work at the Star office Monday morning. Too early. In the business office, through which it was necessary to pass to get to the editorial rooms—unless you went in the back way up a flight of iron steps, and Martin as a new man did not think of entering this way—he found only one person. She was a girl, homely and sallow. As Martin swung open a little gate, she looked up and then down again and went on doing something.

"Homely girls do that," he reflected. "Report early and spend hours sorting things or copying neatly. She does not try to flirt because she has learned that it is useless. . . ."

He passed through the composing room and went up the stairs. There was no one at all in the City room. It had been cleaned up, that is, there were fewer papers on the floor than when he had talked to John Jayne Scott; but it was not clean. There was dust on everything, and on the green shades of the electric light globes which hung from cords strangely twisted or knotted to regulate their height, finger marks could be seen as plainly as though in soot. Some had initials on them, finger-traced in dust, and one, the year done rather carefully, 1-9-0-5.

"I like this," reflected Martin. "They do not waste time with unnecessary things."

He stood by a small table looking at file copies of news-

papers. They were on sticks with handles like those in barber shops. . . . He felt strangely exuberant. "I am going to like the newspaper business. I know I shall. . . ."

John Jayne Scott came up the stairs. He had on a checked cap, and the look of one who had slept. It was evident that he had shaved and washed his face but there was that look, nevertheless, not sleepy but of sleep. "Good morning," he said throatily. The voice was exactly right to go with the face.

"Good morning." Martin sat down in the chair at the file table.

"You're early," observed John Jayne going into his cubby hole.

"A fellow usually is his first day," said Martin.

He watched John Jayne. On his desk there were two sets of fresh newspapers, separately folded. One set he pushed away from him, still folded, the other he opened with a downward flirting motion and went through the papers with great rapidity. . . . Martin was a little fascinated. Scott was drawing heavy pencil lines down through columns of stuff, and making rings around others. As he marked them he would cut them out and impale them daintily on a spike at his elbow. . . . A man entered the office; another man.

Several men entered the office. . . . They all seemed to come at once. Martin looked at the clock; ten minutes past eight. Something had happened downstairs too. Martin could feel motion, like a ship getting under way. . . . A clacking sound came to him. . . . The linotype machines had started. . . .

Martin felt a thrill. He was sure now that he was

going to like the newspaper business. He studied the faces about him and was especially interested in one young man. . . . Age about twenty-five, thin, not much color, looked really clean. Wore a bow tie, not usual in Carrolton. Cool gray eyes. Smoked a cigar carefully and yet not like a carpenter. Martin watched him a moment. He had thrown his leg up over the corner of a desk and was reading, cigar held easily in his mouth. He seemed relaxed completely. As he raised his eyes over the edge of his paper they met Martin's, and Martin bowed.

Martin got up and went over to him. The man rose quickly, dropping his newspaper in his chair seat. Martin introduced himself. . . . Shirley was the man's name. They sat down, talking. . . . Shirley did courts, the City Hall, politics. Martin liked him at once. . . . "Have a Rameses," he said. Shirley held up his cigar, his eyes saying, "No, thank you." "Oh, you're the man Lemp told me about," he said. "I didn't place you for a moment. The name didn't mean anything."

"But the Rameses did," Martin laughed. "I beat him to it," he thought.

Shirley's eyes were laughing. "I could have told it from your clothes," he said simply. "I knew you'd been East to school somewhere. . . . I went to Williams."

"I like him immensely," thought Martin. "He harpooned me at once and yet I don't resent it. I would have done the same thing."

They talked on for possibly ten minutes. Shirley was a Philadelphian. He had left college because his health failed. He had worked for a time as a reporter in Philadelphia and later in New York, on the *Evening Sun*.

Then it had become imperative that he live in the Southwest. "I really don't think I have tuberculosis," said Shirley. "Anyway I like to believe that. But two doctors said I had, and I'm going to stay around here somewhere till I'm sure. . . ."

"What sort of a boss is Scott?" asked Martin.

"Oh, all right." Shirley broke off his cigar ash on the side of his desk. . . . "You might say he was a little old fashioned, but if I were city editor he would say something like that about me. So I don't say it. We get along all right. . . . I don't believe you'll care for doing baseball, though. In the East it's different, but here it doesn't amount to much. I think having you do it was Lemp's idea. He wanted me to do it when I first came. He wants some Eastern slang. He eats up the New York and Chicago stuff, and it's probably his idea to have you do something zippy." He paused and raised his eyes, which were laughing again. "Do you write zippy stuff?"

Martin flushed. "Not very. . . . Do you?"

"Not very," said Shirley quietly. He eyed Martin gravely. "That was a bit mean of me," he confessed. . . . "It was the Rameses. You saw I was smoking a cigar."

He stood up, brushing ashes off his vest. "I do that sort of thing. Don't mind it."

"What a conceited bird," thought Martin. He reached deep within him for a crushing retort, found nothing. He looked at Shirley and smiled. "Mind? I don't blame you a bit. Any time you catch me posing, give me a jolt." "I will. . . ." Shirley moved toward the cubby hole. "I get my pleasure that way." He turned and came

back. Martin was ready for him.

"You're sort of a professional cynic, eh?"

"Something like that."

"Know what that is?"

"W-e-l-l, perhaps."

"A failure, with a sense of humor as concerns everything but himself."

Shirley tapped his pursed lips with his half closed left hand. "As true as any epigram," he said pleasantly. "We're even now. What I came back to say was this: There is a good baseball story here, and someday it may be written. Very likely I shan't be here, but you, whether you write zippily or not, may do it. . . . Maybe you already know it?" Martin shook his head. "Well, the Carrolton Baseball Club, otherwise the Panther City Blue Socks, is the joint property of the Honorable James F. Sanderson and the Honorable Hugh Mattison. The Honorable James F. Sanderson is honorable because, as the phrase goes, he is a square gambler. My personal belief is that he is honorable. . . . The Honorable Hugh Mattison is honorable because he is what is known hereabout as County Attorney. Where I come from he would be called the Prosecutor. In New York they call it District Attorney. . . . As you will appreciate, they make lovely partners in the baseball business, or in any other business, and especially the gambling business. . . . Over the Stag Saloon is one of the best equipped gambling joints in your broad state. I hesitate to call it a joint, because really it isn't. As gambling houses go it is all that one could ask. . . . My motive in calling these facts to your attention is to give you a hobby. Some day the whole thing will be spilled, and the spilling will be a lot of fun. . . ."

Martin found himself trembling a little. "Why don't you write it now?" he demanded.

"Not ripe. Town not ripe. Nothing ripe. Couldn't prove anything. Wouldn't dare try to prove anything. Libel! Libel, libel everywhere in this state. And besides, they shoot. That isn't any stage joke. Everybody except babies in diapers, ministers and W. T. Sterrett knows the facts, but you can't print 'em! On paper, and in the paper, the club is owned jointly by Sanderson and the Honorable Bill Gleeson. He is honorable because he is alderman from the third ward. . . . Oh, it's beautiful."

W. T. Sterrett. . . . Martin was in the Sisters Grove, twisting a stick. Vada's brown legs, Mr. Sterrett's red tongue and moustache, the ants on the table-cloth . . . his preserved figs. . . . His mind fought to throw back. . . . He could see that broken stick so plainly, its fibers. . . .

Shirley was looking at him oddly.

"Did you say W. T. Sterrett?" asked Martin vaguely. "Yes, W. T. We call him that. He's a reformer. He has a tongue like an ant-eater and he rouges—his mind. . . ."

Martin winced inwardly. "I wonder if I do? That was a good line. I wish it had been mine."

"He used to be in the Sunday School business," continued Shirley. "He speaks in tents now and in things they call tabernacles. His subject is women. He knows his subject too. He ought to: that's all he thinks about."

"I used to know him," said Martin, the vague note still in his voice. "I went to his Sunday School. He had the same tongue then. . . . Does he still wear wing collars?"

Shirley laughed. "That's the boy. . . . You'll probably be covering some of his talks. He's Superintendent of Schools now, graduated from the High School principalship two years ago. . . ."

Scott was calling Shirley, standing in his cubby hole door, some clippings in his hand.

"So long awhile," said Shirley. "We'll talk some more."

"So long," said Martin. "You bet we will. Don't think I wasn't interested. I'm really very much obliged. Some day I'll tell you a story about W. T. Sterrett and a girl."

Shirley stopped, his face eager. "Not what you think," said Martin. "She was just a little girl and he was reprimanding her. Strangely, she was Jim Sanderson's daughter. I guess she still is. . . . Vada?"

Shirley came closer, his face serious. "Still is, is right," he said. "She's the prettiest thing in the state. . . . Let me suggest something. If I were you I wouldn't tell anybody any stories about Jim Sanderson's daughter. I mean that. Not even a trivial one."

Martin laughed nervously. "It was a Sunday School picnic episode. It was funny, that's all."

"This was funny, too," said Shirley: "Hugh Mattison wanted to marry Vada Sanderson. He's mad about her. Old enough to be her father but mad about her. But he wasn't good enough. County attorney and one of the best families in the state, but to Jim he wasn't good enough. Not for his daughter. I think Jim was right."

"Mr. Shirley!" John Jayne's voice was impatient, but not too impatient.

"Yes, sir!"

So Sterrett was School Superintendent. The old bastard. . . .

II

"I think I'll put you on baseball," said John Jayne, frowning. He sat leaning way back in his chair looking up at Martin. His manner was one of relieved pondering. He had been thinking of Martin Lavery and of nothing else. He had assigned him to this and to that and to that and to this and had rejected each in turn as not best suited to bring out Martin Lavery's talents. And now, after great deliberation, he had at last hit on baseball.

"It's a little early yet, February," he went on. "But you might browse around the Stag Saloon and get a line on the material for this year. See Bill Gleeson."

"Yes, sir." Martin was determined to ask no questions. He had read somewhere that it was best for a reporter never to ask questions of his City Editor. . . . He waited. "See Bill Gleeson, and get a story on 'prospects for 1905.' He'll give you some sort of stuff."

"Yes, sir." Martin started to go.

"Hold on a minute," said Scott. "One or two things more. You know enough not to use a note-book, don't you? A good newspaper man never uses a note-book: he folds some copy paper, like this." John Jayne picked up a batch from his desk and folded it thrice. "And sticks it in his outside coat pocket like this." John Jayne stuck it in his outside coat pocket.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, here." John Jayne handed him the folded paper, which Martin took and thrust in his side coat pocket as illustrated.

"Got a pencil?" John Jayne handed him one even as he spoke.

"I was going to buy one."

"That's a good one; use that. . . . Stick it here, upside down." Scott rose and thrust the pencil upside down in the small upper outside pocket of Martin's coat. "Upside down that way saves your breaking the point."

"Thank you very much," said Martin. Although he was being patronized, he was in a way thrilled. Scott was a good sort and an enthusiast for his business. . . .

"That's all," said Scott. . . . "Try to get some sort of a story. I won't be hard on you at first. . . ."

Martin started walking away. "And say, Martin," called Scott, "step in just a minute downstairs and see Lemp. . . . And listen. I forgot this. We've got to have some snap to our baseball copy. Get from Lemp some New York and Chicago papers and read their baseball stuff. It may give you some ideas. I've been after Lemp for a long time to put more zip into our baseball stuff."

"Good idea," said Martin. "I'll see Lemp, as you suggest." However, he walked out without doing so.

Chapter VII

THE Stag Saloon stood at the corner of Eighth and Main Streets. It had a heavy and polished bar of mahogany inviting to the elbows, and bell-mouthed cuspidors of brass, two feet high. They too were polished and inviting. They suggested perpetually renewed virginity: they shone purely yet you knew they had seen life, and by that token you were fascinated. To look at them was to want to spit. This impulse was strong, wellnigh irresistible, irrespective of whether or not the exigences of the moment or the habits of a lifetime made spitting necessary or desirable. So you spat.

There was nothing else in Carrolton quite like the Stag Saloon, although there were a great many other saloons in town. Some of them sold good beer and good whiskey; some of them sold bad beer and bad whiskey; some of them had women in rooms upstairs—good or bad women accordingly as you viewed their technique or their morals-who signalled the bartender below by rattling the cords of the small elevator, whose freight. moving periodically upward, consisted of beer in small glasses and bar whiskey, carefully poured. . . . Some of them sold gin to negroes, and gin and cocaine to white women who consorted with them; some of them catered to the transient trade near the union station, where at least two of them alleged that they were "The First and Last Chance Bar-Biggest Beer in Town for a Nickel-Hot Free Lunch"; some of them specialized in the callow youth, or squirt, trade, allowing an inordinate amount of dice throwing on the bar and, in cases, giving "credit till Saturday," this notwithstanding the conspicuously displayed sign, "Positively No Tick," which, contrary to the intent of an accompanying slogan, "Tie the Bull Outside," was meant to be construed in all literalness. . . .

The owners of these resorts, in the order of their numbers, were Irish, Germans, Jews, and, as Carrolton knew the term, Americans. The Americans and the Irish ran the best, the cleanest, squarest places, and among these The Stag was pre-eminent. It was owned, managed, super-managed by Jim Sanderson, who, from wine vaults below to the gambling club above, did everything-and nothing. In one respect only did it have a note of universality with the town's other resorts. All were individual propositions. In these days in Carrolton, which was about the time the Saturday Evening Post was advertising "Nearly Three Quarters of a Million Circulation," local breweries had not learned that the liquor business could be syndicated successfully; and just as milk was sold from cans by individuals who smelled of cow barns, strong drink was sold by actual saloon proprietors or their immediate employees, who smelled or did not smell, though not of cow barns, according to the location and gradation of their establishments. . . . In short, the chain store movement and its after-birth of standardization was about in its seventh month of gestation, and Carrolton, far southwest, was, except in a vague stirring way, not aware of the approaching event. . . . New York was the mother, Carrolton an uncurious child to whom the widening waistline meant nothing. It was an average western town, which cussed, ate in short-order restaurants, was badger hair-cutted, and satisfied... There were oases, of course, and exceptions: a small country club; a few women who played bridge and smoked, thirty automobiles, eight of them Wintons, the new restaurant with table lights, Pearl Beebe's \$10 house where all the girls wore evening clothes ... and The Stag.

II

Martin went down the iron stairs at the back of the Star office. The other men had gone down this way. . . . He clattered. He carried his copy paper folded in his coat pocket just as Scott had shown him, and his pencil, in the pocket above, was upside down. He had begun. He would live now, seeing life as it should be seen, probing it, more than probing it, dissecting it; he would see everything, feel everything; and some day, if he could ever co-ordinate his thoughts, he would sit down calmly and dispassionately and write about it. "Not calmly and dispassionately," he corrected. "That is what the engineers do. Rather, feverishly and passionately. That is my way. If it were calm and dispassionate it would be like a mechanical drawing and I would tear it up. It would be smudged and messy. . . . The Jap's would be better. . . ."

He swung south along Thurston Street and east into Main. He was a reporter, vested with authority to analyze life, to question people. He would question many people; and always he would get from them more

than they thought they gave him. This would be won-derful.

Suddenly he was depressed. . . . He walked on, swiftly. It was strange, his being depressed. Here he was beginning, and he was depressed. There was something. . . . There were two things. One of them was plain. They wanted him to imitate the New York and Chicago baseball writers. That was one of them. The other was vaguer . . . but he could see it. . . . Jim Sanderson. He was in partners with the County Attorney. That was bad. It was all right to be a gambler, there was romance to that. It showed independence of spirit, contempt for the puritans. You wanted to be a gambler and you became one. You stood in your saloon in a clean shirt and watched life. "I want to be like that," thought Martin. "I want to stand at my bar in a clean shirt and watch them come and go. They are a little afraid of Jim and they will be a little afraid of me. They are flattered when he bows to them. They know, although they can't express it, that he sees them naked and that they see him in a clean shirt. If he drinks with them or calls them by their first names or cashes a check for them they are enthralled.

"But he is crooked. He is a fake. His place is fixed, and I am sorry. My mother said he was a romantic gentleman, and I wanted him to be one."

His jaw muscles tightened. He would fight fakes . . . he would fight fakes everywhere, in everybody, in himself. . . . He was talking to Shirley . . . some day it would be spilled, and there would be a lot of fun in spilling it. He would spill things for them He would go through life spilling things . . . that would

be his mission. . . . He was elated now. He could throw his soul into this, spilling things. . . Libel, libel everywhere, but he would do it nevertheless. . . . There would be ways. . . . He was jubilant, talking to Shirley again. "Not ripe," said Shirley. "Nothing is ripe yet," said Martin. "I am not ripe . . . but I will be . . . I must not get sour on the newspaper business because there are restrictions. Every restriction can be over-ridden. . . . It all depends on your intelligence . . . and I have the intelligence" Still he hoped it was not true about Sanderson and Hugh Mattison, Perhaps it wasn't. . . .

III

The Stag had no front door, that is, no swinging doors. You entered it as you entered a bank. At the end of the bar nearest the door there was a screen, standing behind which you were shielded from the street: but further along the bar you could be seen, and from the street. Gazing obliquely through the door as he neared it Martin could see men's backs. It was about half past nine in the morning, yet there were about half a dozen patrons at the bar. He could see the far end of the bar. That is where, in his mind's eye, Jim Sanderson stood; but Jim was not there.

Martin entered.

Almost directly behind the bar screen was the cigar counter. A man stood behind this, his elbows on the glass, reading a newspaper. Behind him on the wall were pictures, photographs. Martin remembered now. Bill

Gleeson had a collection of lynching pictures. . . . Very dimly he could recall his mother talking about them to his father, Alderman Gleeson's lynching pictures. These were the ones . . . He kept them at The Stag so that the public might enjoy them. At the court house, in the basement, they kept Confederate battle flags and the cap of the first locomotive engineer who drove a train into Carrolton.

"I want to see Mr. Gleeson," said Martin, approaching the cigar counter. . . . He rested his hands on the glass. . . . "Or Mr. Sanderson," casually.

"What about?"

"Baseball, I'm from the *Star*. I want some stuff about this year's team."

The man folded his newspaper and tucked it between the cigar counter and the bar, in a little crevice. It fitted snugly.

"I usually give out the baseball stuff," he said. "I'm secretary of the Club. There ain't much doin' now. Kelley'll be back at third. We let McCree go. We've made the grand stand bigger. . . ." He paused. "The Star's printed all that," he drawled. . . . "Just what do you want to know?"

"Possibly nothing you can give me," said Martin. . . He felt small and angry. "I'm new at this," he said testily. "I wanted to sit down and talk it all over with somebody.

. . . I see you're too busy. I'll wait for Mr. Gleeson . . . or see Mr. Sanderson. . . ."

The man pulled his newspaper out of the crevice. His eyes said, "You damn little squirt." He sat down behind the cigar counter. "Do whatever you want to," he said. "Mr. Gleeson will refer you to me. Mr. Sanderson never

gives out any baseball news. Everybody in town knows that."

Martin swallowed. "I can't blame him," he thought. "I am new. I didn't even study last year's line-up before coming here. The names he mentioned meant nothing to me. I didn't see Lemp and get those New York and Chicago papers. I wanted to do it in my own way. I have and I've bungled it. . . . I'm a damn fool."

He would buy a drink and wait for Gleeson. . . . He would like to talk to Jim Sanderson but he was afraid. Yes, he would admit it, he was afraid. Jim would not only think he was a squirt, he would know he was. He would say, "Go see Smith," or whatever the man's name was at the cigar counter. Martin realized that he had not asked the man his name nor told him his. He had not introduced himself with assurance. No wonder the man had patronized him. Jim would certainly do it. He was not a romantic gentleman. He was a mucker and a gambler and a saloon keeper. He had no taste and no imagination. Letting Bill Gleeson display his lynching pictures in The Stag showed this. . .

"What time does Mr. Gleeson come in?"

"About now." The man behind the cigar counter did not look up.

Martin moved along the bar.

"Let me have a Scotch high-ball," he said.

He sipped it, looking at the lynching pictures. Black caps were not used at such informal bees, and tongues protruded. In one group three young negroes swung from the same limb of a giant cottonwood, heads strangely twisted. Beneath them, rifles at their sides, jaws grimly set, the posse stood, and proudly.

Martin swung about and faced the cigar counter again. "What time does Mr. Sanderson come in?"

"About now." The man looked up this time. He had twisted his mouth, but not into a smile. "Office boys look that way when you insist on seeing the boss," thought Martin, "and professors' secretaries when, having told you you can't possibly see the professor, you say, casually, 'Oh, but he'll see me.'"

He felt easier now. The fresh alcohol in his stomach was changing his viewpoint. He had not bungled his interview with the man at the cigar counter. He had done just right; he had ignored him. He had, in effect, told him to go to hell. He had told Scott and Lemp to go to hell. He had not read those papers and he didn't intend to. He had not meekly talked to this club secretary, gratefully jotting down notes that meant nothing, and he didn't intend to. . . . He would see Bill Gleeson or, better, Sanderson. . . . He would always see Gleeson or Sanderson. . . . Other reporters might talk to secretaries, he wouldn't. . . .

"Let me have another Scotch high-ball, will you?"

He drank a third of it at a draft. He had eaten only a little breakfast. . . . He could feel the alcohol taking hold, expanding his ego, reinforcing his confidence. . . . The warmth, the desire to talk, the apparent perfect balance between physical and mental well-being, were marvelous. . . . He wanted to laugh. Of course he had done right. . . . He would see Sanderson himself; that would be different. Everybody else saw the man behind the cigar counter. He would interview Jim Sanderson He would introduce himself and he would say that he had gone to Sunday School with his daughter.

He would ask about her. If he wanted to he would say with utter irrelevancy, "The last time I saw her was at the Baptist picnic. W. T. Sterrett was all excited because she had been in wading with a boy."

"I am a liar," thought Martin. "I won't do any such thing. I won't mention about Hugh Mattison's owning half of the baseball club either, or his rushing Vada. . . . I would be crazy to do it."

He finished his drink.

"There's Mr. Sanderson now." The man at the cigar counter was speaking. He had risen and was tucking his newspaper in the crevice again. His voice was a

challenge. . . . He pointed. . . .

Martin looked toward the end of the bar. . . . He saw a slender man in a soft gray suit. . . . His coat was open. He wore no waistcoat. His pleated shirt was spotless but not shiny. His collar was low, almost like Martin's, and under its edges he had thrust the ends of a black bow tie. He wore a soft mouse-colored hat, crushed in at the top, well back on his head, exposing a fine forehead. . . . One arm rested easily on the end of the bar. No hand protruded from the sleeve.

"Mr. Sanderson?"

Martin extended his hand as he spoke.

"Y-e-s." With his right, which was his only hand, the gambler took Martin's. His grip was firm but not hearty. It was the grip of merest courtesy.

"My name is Martin Lavery. I—I came to see you for the Star."

"Y-e-e-s.... Why don't you see Nagel?"— Sanderson pointed with his good hand toward the cigar counter. Nagel seemed to be looking at them....

"I don't want to see Nagel. I want to see you."

"Uh-huh. What is it then?"

"Why, nothing in particular. About baseball. You're the club owner, and I came to you; that's all."

"I only own part of the club. Alderman Gleeson and I own it together. He runs it, and I look on. See him. Or, as I said, see Nagel. . . . You'll excuse me, I'm sure."

Martin leaned against the bar. His impulse was to order another drink, to invite Sanderson to have one.
. . . He was being patronized and humiliated. . . . Sanderson ought to be ordering the drink and they should be standing, talking pleasantly and familiarly, Martin occasionally making a casual note. . . .

"You'll excuse me, I'm sure. I am glad to have met you." The gambler slid his handless arm off the bar and started moving away.

"I used to know your daughter, Vada, and my mother knew you," said Martin. "I thought we might have a little talk. . . ."

Sanderson wheeled and came close to him. He looked at him intently. "What did you say your name was?"

"Martin Lavery. Anne Lavery was my mother. I used to hear her speak of you. And Vada was in my Sunday School class."

"Why, of course I know you! I thought you all were in the East somewhere. I knew your uncle, too. . . . You're Martin Searle's nephew, aren't you, and his name-sake?"

"I am, and I'm living with my aunt now."

"He could get drunker than any man in the state,"

said Sanderson. "He used to come in here, not this place, but the old Stag, and I used to have to get his money and his watch from him before he lost them, and telephone Mrs. Searle. She would drive down in her phaeton, and sometimes we could persuade him to go home. . . . Not always. . . ." He looked at Martin. "How old are you?"

"Nearly twenty."

"I heard somewhere you were at college."

"I was but I quit."

"What'd you quit for?"

"Didn't like it."

"Well, that's a good reason. . . . It was mine."

"I didn't know you went to college."

"Not many people in this town do," said Sanderson.
"Your mother did. I went to the University of Virginia.
Stayed two years. . . . Got to gambling. . . .
Otherwise I might have been a lawyer. . . ."

Martin studied him. . . . He noted that his face was almost colorless and yet not sallow. . . . His hair, at the temples where it could be seen beneath his hat, was coal black. So were his eyebrows and eyelashes. His lips were firm and thin, but not too thin, his nose straight. . . . The eyes were gray. "He is about forty-five," reflected Martin, "and looks thirty-eight. I believe he is a romantic gentleman. . . . He does not drink much. . . . From his face he could be either a gambler or a good sheriff or a poet or a great trial lawyer. . . . I like that gray suit, too. It was not made here. . . . He probably thinks as much as I do, but has a much better grip on his emotions."

With an almost imperceptible motion of his head, Sanderson signalled the bartender. "What'll you have?"

They drank, Martin another Scotch high-ball, Sanderson about an eighth of an inch of bourbon straight, in a small glass.

"You're not going to be a boozer, are you, Martin?" he asked.

Martin felt no resentment. Jim Sanderson was asking it, not his father, or a W. C. T. U. worker. Moreover, it was being asked as they drank, and Jim Sanderson, asking it, had ordered the drink. It was really not a question. It was the observation of one man to another.

"I don't think so," he said slowly.

He looked at Sanderson. "What made you ask me that? How can I, at my age, answer it honestly?"

"That's why I asked it. . . . Because you can, at your age, answer it . . . honestly."

Martin laughed. "Well, I'd as soon make a pledge to you as anybody. But I don't believe in pledges. . . . "

"Mr. Nagel," said Sanderson, addressing the man at the cigar counter who had risen respectfully at his approach, "this is Mr. Martin Lavery, an old friend of mine. Any baseball news you have from time to time, please see that he gets. When he wants to see me, please see that he does."

Martin and Nagel shook hands-vigorously.

They moved from behind the screen, Martin and Jim, and stood for a moment near the open door. Jim held out his hand. "Come and see me again. If you've got to hang around a saloon make it The Stag." He hesitated a moment. "If you want to call on the finest girl

in America, come and see my daughter. We'd both be mighty glad to see you. Though I'm seldom home nights."

"I certainly will," said Martin heartily.

But it was months before he did.

Chapter VIII

HIRLEY cleaned out John Jayne Scott's desk, removing clippings from hooks in thick layers which he threw bodily with a thwop into the waste paper basket, hurling after them books, pamphlets and maps. These he threw with force, edges foremost.

Martin came and stood a moment watching him. It was nearly noon, and five or six weeks after he had begun work on the *Star*. "What's happened?" he asked.

"A lot—and nothing," said Shirley, continuing with his house-cleaning. "Scott's gone. He had a run-in with Lemp and left about half an hour ago. I'm sorry."

"So am I," said Martin. He sat down in a chair near the file table. It was tragic, Scott already gone with his battered clipping of the Halverton flood story, gone to some other paper where he would begin all over again. . . .

Shirley spoke over his shoulder: "Say, Lavery, do you want to keep on with baseball?"

"No," said Martin. "Why?"

"Because you don't have to. Sit down a minute."

Martin sat, drawing his chair across the threshold as he had before.

"I think they're going to keep me on this desk," Shirley explained, "and that will mean that somebody will have to cover City Hall and Police. If you want me to I'll suggest to Lemp that you do it."

"That would be fine," said Martin. "But who'll do baseball?"

"Mrs. Allen, the Society Editor. She craves it. She craves to write initial sack instead of first base. She has a notion that flip words can take the place of ideas. That's what most of these baseball writers think. Until they get over it, they'll never be writers."

Martin smiled. He felt that he and Shirley had known each other for a long time.

Lemp was agreeable to the arrangement, and when Martin reported for work next morning he found Shirley clipping the morning paper and whistling softly. "Here," he said, and handed Martin a book of street car tickets and a badge. The badge was nickel-plated, scaly in spots, and bore the words, "Star Reporter."

Martin stood holding it in his hand, dubiously. "You don't wear it," laughed Shirley. "At least I didn't. But it goes with the City Hall job. When there's a fire or anything where the police might stop you, stick it in your pocket and take it along."

Martin felt relieved. He moved away from the cubby hole and sat over near the file table, waiting. Shirley had told him to wait. Later, when Shirley was through giving out assignments, he was going to take him over to the City Hall and break him in on his run. He examined the badge, turning it over and over in his hand. . . . He stood on a broad stretch of green lawn in front of a hotel. There was a platform of new wood, unpainted and smelling of shavings. On it was a band, which played; and on the lawn hundreds of men in uniform were lined up, all wearing white gloves. They wore plumed hats. They were Knights of Pythias. . . . Martin's father

was a Knight of Pythias. . . . Martin stood with his mother and watched. She carried a plum-colored sunshade. . . . The men began marching, and their plumes tossed. . . . Presently he saw his father. He had stepped out of line and was being presented with something. . . . A sword and a big badge, blue with gold letters. . . . Suddenly Martin's mother laughed. Martin looked up at her. He looked at his father: he had knelt and a man was standing over him, saving something. . . . Martin began to cry. He was furious at his mother for laughing. . . . She was making fun of his father. . . . "That was in 1891, that summer in Wisconsin," reflected Martin. "I was six years old. I have never liked badges since. I think, although I am not sure, that I understood then. . . . My father was ridiculous and he was tragic. . . . "

Shirley came noseying out of the cubby hole, holding a slip of paper.

"Want to crusade a little?"

Martin rather liked the irony in his voice. "I might." "There's a family out on Louisiana Avenue all excited because a school teacher whipped their boy. They say he's bruised and in bed. See them and then see the teacher. She's in the fourth grade at the Seventh Ward school. Here's her name and the family name and address. . . . I'll do City Hall for you to-day. This looks like a good story. . . ." Shirley handed him the slip of paper.

II

Martin used his book of street car tickets. He was happy. . . . Shirley had not patronized him by giving

him elaborate instructions. He rode many blocks. Louisiana Avenue was way out. Martin knew the kind of people who lived there. Not very poor people, not, possibly, street car conductors. Rather locomotive engineers, and skilled mechanics who made "good money." They gave parties, of a kind, and were satisfied with them.

Both the mother and the grandmother received him. They began talking at the same time, saying what a good boy Judson was and how he had never had any trouble with any teacher or anybody, and how he had come home sobbing.

"She had beaten him," said the mother, "unmercifully. We demand an investigation."

"Why, the child's black and blue," said the grandmother.

Martin listened attentively. He wrote down, with unusual care for him, the boy's name, Judson Ward, the father's name, Oliver Ward, his business, foreman at the Gulf and Western shops; the address, 1321 Louisiana Avenue; the mother's name, Adelaide Ward, the grandmother's, Mrs. Mary Carter, widow; the boy's age, ten... No other children.

"Want to see him?" Mrs. Ward lowered her voice and raised her eyebrows as one does in speaking of a corpse.

Martin said he would.

Mrs. Ward led the way across the hall from the "parlor" where they had been sitting. They entered a bedroom.

Judson sat in bed, propped up with pillows. . . . There were breakfast dishes on a chair beside him. He grinned and slid down the pillows as though saying, "Gee."

He was pleased. Mrs. Ward was pleased. . . . The grandmother was pleased.

Martin approached the bed, and looked down at Judson, who in turn looked up at him. He had beady black eyes. His head was almost round, and the hair, which had evidently been clipped not so long ago, grew in bristly streaks. Martin took an instant and violent dislike to him.

"Let's see where she beat you," he said.

"Judson, show the reporter," said the grandmother.
"He is going to write it up for us. Let the gentleman see. . . ." She paused, tittering. She looked helplessly at her daughter.

Mrs. Ward was embarrassed. She tittered and looked at Martin. She approached the bed. She would conduct the ceremony properly. She peeled back the covers, exposing Judson clad in canton flannel night drawers. Deftly she unbuttoned them.

Martin looked. Judson was black and blue. He was mottled. He was green in spots and pale yellow.

"That'll do," said Martin. He turned away from the bed. "He's been whipped all right," he thought. "Whipped good. . . ." "All right, Mrs. Ward," he said. "I'm much obliged. It was good of you to go to so much trouble."

"No trouble at all," Mrs. Ward assured him. "You're the one to be thanked, I'm sure. . . . Will it be in this afternoon's paper?"

"I guess so," said Martin. . . . He hated these people. He hated the bullet-headed child. . . . "I'm wrong," he told himself. "I must stop this. I'm going

entirely by impressions. The facts are all on their side. . . ."

He used his street car book again. The Seventh Ward School stood, as most Carrolton schools did, in the exact center of a lot, about 300 x 300, entirely bare of grass. Sycamore trees had been planted around the lot; and when he had time the janitor watered them. They looked

watered, sickly, bottle-fed.

The school yard, and especially the boys' side, was worn slick. "It reminds me of the entrance and the ground around a prairie-dog hole," thought Martin. . . . He walked toward the main entrance, passing, as he crossed the yard, bits of bread crust and half of a sandwich, that is to say, the upper or the lower piece of bread, complete, not the sandwich broken or half eaten. . . . There was red jelly on it. . . . In a far corner of the yard a dog was nuzzling something, half-chewing, throwing his head up. He seemed fat . . . Martin laughed. "And vet they would write it, 'A lean dog gnawed at a stale bone.' That is the way they imitate. When I write it, if ever I do, the dog will be lean if he is lean and fat if he is fat, and eating whatever he is eating. They can't put any lean dogs over on me unless they are lean." He laughed again. "What the hell do I care how they write it?"

The teacher's name was Helen Dalton. She seemed to be about nineteen. She was at the blackboard when Martin entered. He had asked a child in the hall where her room was, avoiding going to the principal's office.

She came and stood by the desk. Every child stopped work and watched them. Miss Dalton looked stolid, confident. "Yes?" she smiled. . . . Martin was an

agent of some kind. He was going to tell her that he had the principal's permission to show a folding lunch-box or a device with an elastic by which maps could be traced with great accuracy.

Martin found it a little difficult to introduce himself. There was of course the obvious dramatic way: "Miss Dalton, I'm a reporter from the *Star*. We are informed and so forth. . . ." He rejected this. . . . He lowered his voice. . . . "Did you whip the Ward boy, yesterday?"

Miss Dalton's face got red. . . . "Who are you?" she demanded.

"I represent the *Star*," said Martin. "The family telephoned the office and they sent me to investigate . . . I'm sorry."

Miss Dalton grew pale. She picked up her handkerchief on her desk and began wiping the chalk off her hands. . . . She brushed her skirt, sketchily.

"I saw the child," said Martin, "and he was pretty badly bruised. . . . Did you do it?"

"I suppose I did," said Miss Dalton. "I didn't examine him. . . ." Her eyes flashed with a smile despite herself. "He needed it. He's a stubborn, dirty boy."

"What did you whip him with?"

"A ruler. . . . I paddled him."

"What for?" It occurred to Martin that he hadn't asked Judson or his family a single question on this score: why she had whipped him, how she had whipped him, what he had done. . . .

Miss Dalton hesitated. . . . "I wouldn't tell you," she said. "I couldn't. He's a loathsome child. . . .

I took him out in the cloak room. He kicked and yelled and called me bad names, terrible names. But I held him. . . ." Miss Dalton's voice was grim. "And when I was through I gave him a shove, up against the wall. Yes, I did. Then I reckon he ran home. . . . He hasn't been back since. That's about all, except that, after whipping him, I washed my hands."

Martin took out his copy paper and made some notes. Miss Dalton crushed her handkerchief in her hand. "And you're going to put it in the paper?"

"I guess I'll have to."

She caught her breath. "Please don't.... It wouldn't be fair. You don't know the child. Any teacher would have whipped him. You would have whipped him... His father told me to whip him."

Martin studied her. She was a stolid girl, heavy busted, not very tall, glossy black hair parted exactly in the middle. . . . Her shirt-waist was white. She had pieces of paper pinned over her cuffs. . . . Her shoes were button ones, and she had polished them herself. . . . Martin could tell: they had that purple look. . . . Years ago he had polished his shoes that way, using stuff from a bottle and a brush on a slender wire. . . . "That's different," he said. "Why didn't you tell me that at first?"

Miss Dalton seemed confused. . . "Well," she floundered, "because. . . . You see I didn't whip him because his father told me to. That was a long time ago. He said when he brought him to school that I should whip him any time he needed it. They couldn't do anything with him. I didn't whip him then, but I did yester-

day because he maddened me so. He's a loathsome child."

"Well, if you feel so justified what do you care if we do print it?"

"Because I'll lose my place as a teacher. They'll have a school board meeting and I'll be discharged. . . . They do that, when the newspapers print items like this."

"Isn't corporal punishment allowed in the Carrolton schools any more?"

"No; not officially." Miss Dalton admitted it uneasily. "We all do it, though, when we have to. After I had whipped him I told Mr. Kircher, the principal, and he said, 'Good for you.' But if they have an investigation he wouldn't say that. Naturally he wouldn't say that. . . ."

"Where's his office?"

"On the first floor, near where you came in. But he's not here to-day. . . . You won't print it, will you? . . . You don't want to have me dismissed, now do you?" "Gosh, no," said Martin. "Certainly not. But I don't know what I can do. What can I do?"

"I can hardly do that," said Martin slowly. . . . "It isn't my property now, the facts; they're the paper's. I'd like to. Honestly I would. I'm afraid I can't though. . . ." Involuntarily he crushed his hat tighter, a signal that he was going. . . .

Miss Dalton went white. She shut her mouth, until nearly all the blood left her lips. . . . Her eyes blazed. . . .

Martin could see her whipping the Ward boy. "That is the way she looked," he reflected. "She has a temper.

. . . She's not a lady. I wonder how, and why, she took to teaching school?"

"I'll sue you," said the girl. "I'll sue the *Star* for libel. You can't print it. You won't print all of it. You won't print what a loathsome child he is. You won't print the names he called me. You won't print that Mr. Kircher commended me for doing it. . . . Why, you'll leave out *all the important facts*, and just say I whipped him cruelly. . . ."

She seemed scarcely able to breathe. . . .

"Oh, yes, we will," said Martin. "The Star's a fair paper. . . . I think I understand your viewpoint. . . ." He backed away, fumbling behind him for the door-knob. He could not seem to find it. He faced about, his back toward her.

"I'll sue you," she threatened again. "I give you warning, I'll sue you. Better tell your editor that."

Martin closed the door behind him, softly.

III

Shirley listened attentively to his recital, tapping his teeth.

"You are a Sir Galahad," he said dryly. "Miss Dalton must have been pretty."

Martin flushed. "No, she wasn't. I didn't like her. But I know how she felt. I felt almost the same way toward the child myself. And the father said do it."

"Did you see the father?"

Martin looked blank. "No. . . ." He felt very childish. He had never thought of seeing the father to confirm what the girl said.

"Write your story then. Write it carefully. . . . She admits whipping him. That's enough. . . ."

"She said she'd sue us," said Martin. He turned away. "That was cowardly," he reflected. "Either write it and shut up . . . or don't write it."

Shirley flung round on him. "What's the matter with you! Don't you like the newspaper business?"

Martin could feel himself trembling. . . . Their eyes met. "Yes, I like it, but I'm interested in the truth. . . ."

Shirley came walking out of the cubby hole. He was a little white. Martin could see his nostrils dilate. . . . "And I'm not! . . ."

"I didn't say that," said Martin sullenly. He sat down at a desk in a far corner of the room.

Shirley strode over to him. "What do you mean then?" "I don't know," said Martin. . . . He felt helpless. . . .

Shirley regarded him a moment. "Look here," he said. "Don't you suppose I get your viewpoint? Do you think I'm a fool? Don't you suppose I know just what's in your mind? It was as plain as day as you talked to me. You want to write it all—" Shirley opened his mouth wide and breathed out the word heavily—"or nothing. You want to give the flavor of the Ward family, including grandma's social dilemma and the mother's eagerness for publicity . . . and the teacher as you saw her. . . ." He paused. . . . "Now don't you?"

"Maybe I do," said Martin. . . . "What of it?"

"Well, you can't do it. In the newspaper business, as in everything else, you've got to stick to facts. You might as well learn it now. Go on now, and write it. . . ."

Shirley's voice became kindly as he finished. . . . "And just remember that I understand. . . . "

Martin wrote, fairly rapidly, long hand:

The family of Oliver Ward, 1321 Louisiana Avenue, complained to the *Star* to-day that their son, Judson, ten years old, had been so severely punished by a teacher at the Seventh Ward School that he was badly bruised and forced to remain at home in bed.

The *Star* investigated. The child was in bed. There were marks on his body. In fact, he was black and blue.

Later, a *Star* reporter called at the Seventh Ward School and saw the teacher, Miss Helen Dalton. She admitted whipping Judson. She said he was a bad (Martin wrote loathsome and crossed it out) boy and that she had given him a good whipping, because he needed it. She added that the child's father had given her permission to administer punishment, when, in her opinion, Judson needed it.

Miss Dalton greatly regretted that the affair was being made public. She seemed to feel that she would be made a scape-goat, explaining that, in case there was a school board inquiry, she might be dismissed, although other teachers administered corporal punishment when it was necessary. In fact, Miss Dalton hinted that corporal punishment was unofficially allowed in all the schools under the administration of W. T. Sterrett.

He laid the sheets on Shirley's desk, waited until he looked up.

"I think those are the facts," he said. "I'm sorry if I was pig-headed. . . ."

Shirley read rapidly. "Couldn't you have written more?" He was frankly annoyed. . . . "Not much life to it, either."

"Those are the facts," said Martin. "Isn't that what you want? I thought it was. . . ."

Shirley's eyes narrowed. "No, you didn't. There's middle ground, and you know it." He stood up and crumpling the sheets in his hand threw them on the floor. "Suppose you try again. . . . Look here, Lavery, I like you. Don't be a damn fool. . . ."

Martin walked slowly over to the table. He began writing. . .

Lemp came running up the stairs. Not two steps at a time: one at a time, but very rapidly. He had long legs, and it was funny to see him.

"Who's got this school teacher story?"

"Lavery went out there," said Shirley. His voice was a trifle apologetic. Martin looked up.

"Has he written it?"

"He's writing it now."

"Well, kill it."

"I was going to go over it carefully," said Shirley.

"Kill it," repeated Lemp. "She called up just now. What's her name?—Miss Dalton. Said she'd sue us. Said the father told her to punish the boy."

Shirley twisted his mouth.

Lemp laughed as though he were a very careless person. "Not for us," he said. "No charges filed, no arrest, no formal complaint of any kind. If the school board

takes it up then possibly we'll get in on it. Unt—uh. We'll wait."

* * *

Martin walked slowly homeward from the office that afternoon, thinking. Shirley had not read the last sentence of his story or he would have understood better. Of course he would; it was as plain as day: "In fact Miss Dalton hinted that corporal punishment was unofficially allowed in the schools under the administration of W. T. Sterrett."

Martin's lips moved. Old Sterrett, eh? He'd get him some day. . . Either whipping was allowed in the schools, or it wasn't. . . . He could see Mr. Sterrett at his desk. He had nice paper weights.

Chapter IX

UNE.... The side porch at the Wynne home was on the north side of the house. It was vinesheltered now, so shady by day that after a shower you almost expected to find ferns growing in the damp spots on the floor; so dark by night that, except when the moon shone through the honeysuckles, they could scarcely see each other's faces as they sat three feet apart. They sat this way, Martin and Madeline, for hours, silent, thrilled, throbbing. Words were unnecessary. It was not necessary even that they see each other. . . . Only faintly could Martin see her profile, a grey blur like something deep under clear water. . . . He could hear her breathing, and he knew that her breasts rose and fell, and vet, only very dimly, could he see this. "It is like listening to rustling leaves," he thought. "You hear them and know they move and yet unless you watch you do not see them. Only her breasts moving are the petals of a white flower, stirring softly. . . . And I, although I am coarse, I, I hope, am the humming-bird. I sit here motionless, and yet I am poised and vibrant as he is. . . . I am vibrant with love for her. . . . I hope she feels this as I do. . . . God. I am in love!"

He was coarse. . . . This worried him. He had a coarse mind. "All this falls from me when I am with her," he reflected. "It is strange. She is so young and she

knows so little and yet when I am with her I find peace. It must be because in something I have at last found perfection. To me she is perfect, and I am content just to be near her. . . . My mind stops fighting. . . . All thoughts, except of her, are unimportant; and my thoughts of her satisfy me. . . . It must be a good love, for I have never kissed her: never tried, never even held her hand. . . . Actually I do not want to kiss her. The animal is in me still, of course; but when I come in her presence it grows quiet and I am content to wait. . . . She is like the blossom from which the bee turns without despoiling. . . . He will come again perhaps, but not to-day. Always I sit sanctified beneath the honeysuckles. . . . Other fellows who call drop their smutty stories and their cigarettes at the curb, I. my character. . . . "

Other fellows did call. . . . Madeline had perhaps ten persistent suitors. Suitors is not the word, because at sixteen, she did not think of marriage; but in their ardor they were suitors, and Madeline played them, one against the other, and found it pleasant. . . . She was a born flirt. Man's love, not man, was what she craved. . . . One person enjoyed her conquests more than she. That was her mother. Mrs. Wynne dressed all in black and she had no husband, but no one thought of her as a widow, and no one treated her as such. The procession of young men who came to see Madeline did not. . . . They brought her, sometimes, flowers and occasionally candy; and when Madeline was otherwise engaged they sat and talked to her; and at dances, while other mothers and chaperons sat alone, Mrs. Wynne had

young men about her. . . . She talked always on one subject—Madeline.

Martin liked her and did not like her. "I like her," he reflected, "because she sees that I am intelligent, and has told me so, and because, in a way, she is like her daughter; and I dislike her because through Madeline she is getting emotional experience, love, that is denied her. She is like an old maid watching lovers through a kevhole. . . . The way young men are drawn to Madeline excites her. . . . That is why she guards her so jealously. . . She is afraid that Madeline experiences the same emotions. . . . She hopes that she does, and this terrifies her. . . She makes Madeline flirt. There are two chief reasons for this. So long as Madeline flirts her mother thinks she will have no serious thoughts of marriage, and also Mrs, Wynne can enjoy herself. . . . She would hate me instantly and with an awful hate if she knew how I loved Madeline and how, I think, she loves me. . . . For her to marry me, that, to Mrs. Wynne would be unthinkable. . . . Madeline must marry a rich man . . . and I will never be a rich man. . . . She thinks too that I will be a drunkard . . . and a failure . . . and possibly she's right."

It was difficult to reconstruct the circumstances under which he had fallen in love. It was not like reaching way back into his childhood for some impression that stood out clearly and, standing out, made everything else clear. . . . Madeline's saying so perkily on that day of his first call that he need not call again as far as she was concerned was undoubtedly the first stimulus. And

the way she handled men. . . . She had a marvellous gift for this. "To me she is unusual," thought Martin, "and for that reason I love her. I love all of her. Her mind, into which later I will pour thoughts, her body. . . ." He was ashamed, he hated himself. . . . He did not want to think of her body. . . . It was white . . . beneath the white the faintest pink, as jasmine under the first rays of the morning sun, or some white flower blushing at the bee's caress. . . . No, she had no body yet. . . . He could not think of it. . . . He was vile. . . . "And no mind," he reflected. . . "We really do not exchange thoughts. . . . Compared with what I know she knows nothing. . . . And yet I love her. . . "

They sat on the porch usually till half-past ten, sometimes until eleven, never later. Mrs. Wynne would come to the door and call, "Madeline, time for bed."

"Yes, mother, I wish you wouldn't call me that way, though."

Scraping of chairs. They would stand in the darkness, nearer now than they had sat. Perfume came from her, from her shirt-waist, on which daintily, with a glass stopper she had placed a touch of scent; from her hair, her lips, her body. . . .

He made no attempt to take her hands, but stood, rather rigidly, and when he spoke his voice sounded gruff:

"How about to-morrow night?"

"Sorry, Martin; I've promised Herbert Tevis."

"Friday, then?"

"I'll see. . . . I think I told Walter Connant he might come."

Martin tightened his jaw muscles. . . . "I thought you said you loved me, Madeline."

"Shh!" She swung her head backward, toward the doorway, where her mother stood.

"Do you?". . . . His voice was low and grim.

"Y-es, . . ." very softly.

"Then why can't we have a better understanding?" His voice was pleading. He was not Martin Lavery, he was a child; she was not a girl of seventeen, she was a woman. . . .

"Madeline!"

"Yes, mother, coming right now."

Silence. . . . She held out her hand. . . . He did not take it. "Good-night," he said. . . . He moved toward the porch railing. It was his custom to vault this into the yard, then to climb the iron fence. . . .

"Martin," she whispered. "Don't be mean to me. Don't go like that. . . ." She came close to him again. . . . "I love you," she said. . . . She touched his arm with her fingers. . . .

"That you, Martin?"

Martin checked a leg in mid-air and sat straddling the porch rail.

"Yes, Mrs. Wynne."

"Thought you were here last night."

"I guess I was."

Mrs. Wynne stood in the doorway, Madeline beside her. She laughed. "Look here, Martin, you can't monopolize this girl of mine. There're other boys to be considered. Mustn't over-do things. . . . She's mighty young vet. . . ."

"I won't, Mrs. Wynne. Good-night. . . ." He waited to see if she had anything more to say. . . .

"Good-night," they called in chorus.

"Good-night," he called again, and dropped to the lawn.

He climbed the iron fence carefully. It would be easy to impale yourself, like a clipping on Scott's hooks. Out at his Uncle Martin's in the old days there had been a fence like this, and one night a horse had tried to jump it and had impaled himself. He had groaned all night, and next morning they found him, still alive, the fence twisted and bent, blood all over the gravel. . . . Martin had not seen this, but he had been told about it; and later he had looked at the bent spears and the bloodsoaked gravel and reconstructed the picture. . . . It came to him very vividly now. . . . He paused a moment on the sidewalk, adjusting his hat to suit him. lighting a cigarette. He was rolling them these days. Rameses cost twenty cents a box; besides he was coming slowly to do as Carrolton did, not consciously perhaps, but surely, as one who had lived abroad and acquired an accent relapses inevitably into colloquial speech. . . .

His college clothes were a bit seedy; his heavy oxfords had been half-soled. Only three of his striped made-to-measure shirts were presentable, and he had filled the gaps at Levy Bros., where for two dollars each he had bought shirts of a pattern typically Carroltonian. . . . He had two suits, the black one which on that first Sunday he had worn, and a heavy brown. . . . Both were winter weight. It was mid-summer now and hot, yet he wore them in rotation, vestless as always. . . . When he got some money he would send to Barney Leonard at

college and get another suit. . . . His overcoat, a "paddock," which came in sharply and smartly at the waist and had a graceful skirt, was still serviceable, and so was his dinner coat. He had worn them during the winter with great satisfaction. Few young men in Carrolton owned a tuxedo or other evening clothes. There were two younger dancing clubs, the Sans Pareil, pronounced Sanz Spreel, and the Entre Nous. They gave dances every month, alternating. At these monthly affairs it was not necessary to wear evening clothes; but once a year, during the Christmas holidays, each club gave a dance at which dinner coat or swallowtail was not only necessary but obligatory. Failure to wear one or the other was punishable by a five dollar fine. . . . Then there was much renting.

Martin had joined the Sans Pareil. Young men calling on Madeline, some of them friends of his boyhood, some of them new young men, had asked him to join. Charlie Stewart had in fact written out his application for him as they talked one night. Charlie handed to Martin a sheet of paper. "Mail this to the Club Secretary," said he. Martin read: "Gentlemen: Please consider this my application for membership to the Sans Pareil Dancing Club." Martin stuck it in his pocket and when Charlie had gone tore it up. Later he wrote: "I hereby apply for membership in the Sans Pareil Dancing Club. . . ."

He made few intimate friends among the young men of his age, but he came to have a very definite feel of the town. . . . His reportorial rounds took him everywhere. When work was over and he loafed it was with Shirley or at Police Headquarters or at Fred Hudson's

undertaking establishment. . . . The other young men of the town loafed in pool parlors or in front of the drug stores, drinking "coke." They told dirty stories laboriously, stories that required intricate plotting and structure, and they always made Martin shudder. "They are like those train pamphlets," he thought. . . .

He drank, but not heavily, with Shirley, with the Chief of Police, Jim Hutton, with members of the force, and with the City Physician, Conrad Lyle, a pale young man of thirty-five who had a good sense of humor and more books on venereal diseases than seemed to be needed by a general practitioner. And there were others: the assistant fire chief, Oscar Nelson, who was silent and six feet tall, and the young man at Hudson's undertaking parlors. . . . At night Martin used to sit and watch him work. In a room with a cement floor, sloping toward a drain in the center, the bodies lay. From a chair, smoking, Martin watched. . . . Sometimes the bodies were naked. Sometimes it was necessary to pierce their abdomens. The young man does this adroitly and with apparent pleasure. . . . "Children treat insects and dead animals that way," thought Martin. . . . "We all like to drop a stone on a dead cat, to stick something in it, to turn it over, or squash it. . . . This fellow likes to spear these bodies. . . . He is saying, 'Look! this is a human form. Watch what I do with it!' He does not know this. He thinks he is merely being callous and showing off before me. That is because he has no imagination. . . . he had he would not be an undertaker's assistant. And yet in a way I am like him. . . . I want to spear things, and if they are naked or revolting I am drawn to them all the more. . . . And yet I love a girl of seventeen, and purely."

II

Police Headquarters was in the basement of the City Hall. The City Hall was of white stone. That is to say, it had once been white but now it was dirty, like an old white sweater. "Stains do not improve it as they do shooting jackets or fishing togs, or as scars sometimes help shiny leather goods," thought Martin. "It is simply dirty and therefore less pleasing. Age and dust on an old master give an added touch of distinction. . . On this building, no. It is a fly-specked chromo in a saloon, terrible to begin with and worse as time goes on . . . Art can stand a little dirt, but cheapness and imitation can't. . . ." This rather pleased him He was Art. . . . He could think of anything he chose Dirt, fly-specks, what not, could not hurt him . . .

He liked to come to headquarters. . . . And especially, as to-night, directly after he had been with Madeline. . . . There was contrast to it. He left her and came to Police Headquarters. . . . She would not understand why, and not until later years, when they were married, would he tell her about it. She would understand then: it was because he wanted to see life, had to see it, and with his own eyes, not through the eyes of others. . . . He could get emotions this way, first hand; and no other emotions interested him. "Interest is not the word," he reflected. "Satisfy is more nearly it, but that isn't quite correct. . . . I am at peace only when I see, or think I see, some sort of truth and express

it, or when I am working under great stress or when, in the grip of a great emotion, I wilt as a blossom wilts when the humming-bird touches it. . . . I wilt when I am with her, and that is my greatest happiness. . . . When I tell myself that she loves me or, better, when her lips say it, it is as though a cord, threaded through the tissues of my abdomen and down my spine were suddenly withdrawn. . . ."

He clenched his hands. "God above. I love her! I love her so. . . . That is truth and it is sincere and I am not ashamed."

He was happy; his pulse raced as he stepped into headquarters, down the four stone steps at the corners of which stale, damp dirt, flattened cigarette butts and dead crickets seemed never to vary in their content or miscellany. . . . People spat there, too, in their ascent and descent, quickly and furtively. . . .

Denny Slade was on night duty at the desk. He had his coat off. He was a stocky red-faced man who seemed never able to decide whether he wanted a moustache or not. Martin often bought him drinks. He drank as a man who needed it. Long years of drinking, beginning each day about ten in the morning, earlier if he had been off duty the night before, had built up a tolerance for alcohol that cried constantly for satisfaction. . . .

"Hi, Denny," Martin greeted him. "What's new?" "Nothing," said Slade simply. "Sit down."

He came out from behind a partition behind which, at a desk poorly lighted, he had been reading something, and sat down on a bench near the door. He had slippers on, and he scuffed across the damp cement floor, yawning.

Martin looked at the docket, a big book with fine red

ruled lines top and bottom, saw that, as Denny did, there had been no arrests, and sat down on the bench beside him. They often sat thus, talking. Frequently, Joe Clack, the driver of the patrol wagon, would join them. When it was late, with small chance of the chief or assistant chief dropping in, they would send out for a bucket of beer. . . . It was now about eleven o'clock. . . .

"Where's Joe?" asked Martin.

"Asleep."

Men off duty, and on, when they were not on beat, often slept in a small adjoining room. They had two or three quilts, which smelled, a fact not surprising considering that when a sleeper quitted one he promptly folded it up. . . . Silence. . . .

Presently Joe came in. He came yawning, rubbing his eyes. His coat was off, too. He ran his thumb under his suspenders, hoisting them further up on his shoulders, revealing beneath them as he did so crossed bars of sweat on his shirt at the back. He made a face, scratched, and put on his coat. "Hello, Martin," he said. . . . He sat down. He leaned over after a moment. "Got a message for you." He got up and sauntered toward the door, spat and stood there. He looked over his shoulder at Martin.

Martin rolled a cigarette before joining him. Joe liked to be mysterious. He was always giving Martin tips. . . . Sometimes they panned out. . . .

"What is it?" he enquired.

"Jim Sanderson is looking for you."

"Looking for me?"

"Wants to see you, I mean."

"How do you know?"

Joe half turned his head and spoke through his teeth.

"I was in the Chief's office late this evenin'. I heard him talking on the phone. Seems that Sanderson thought you might be here. . . . I think the Chief gave him your home telephone number. . . . Does he know it?"

"I don't know. Maybe he does. I live with an aunt of mine. Maybe he knows it and maybe he doesn't. . . . "

"I just thought I'd tell you," said Joe.

"Well, I'm much obliged. . . ." He wondered. . . . Jim Sanderson looking for him; he hadn't been doing baseball for months. He threw his cigarette down in a corner of the stone steps. "I guess I'll be getting along. Thank you, Joe. And good-night."

Ш

Quietly he let himself in with his key at Aunt Feddy's. He struck a match in the lower hall, held it high as he moved toward the stairs. Ascending he tiptoed softly, as he did on all nights he came in late, which were many. For him, he was early to-night. . . . He tiptoed down the upstairs hall, toward his room. But she had heard him.

"That you, Martin?"

"Yes, Aunt Feddy. . . ." He stopped, swaying in the darkness. . . . "What is it?"

"What time is it?"

"Only about twelve, I guess."

"Come here a minute. Stand there in the door. I want to talk to you. . . ."

He stood there. He was suddenly very sorry for her. In the dim light he could see her, lying on her back, eyes

open, thinking. "She lies not there but in the grave with Uncle Martin," he thought... "I have neglected her shamefully.... And she is feeding me and giving me a home..."

"Yes?" he said softly.

"I'm worried about you Martin. . . . What do you do nights?"

"I called on Madeline Wynne to-night."

"Stay so late?"

"No. . . . I left around eleven, maybe half-past ten."

"Then what do you do?... Lots of times you don't come in till way after midnight . . . sometimes two or three . . . "

"Oh, I bum around. . . . Sometimes go to the police headquarters, sometimes other places."

"Down in the Acre?..."

"Well, I've been down there . . . but not lately."

"You know the old saying about lying down with dogs: you're bound to get fleas. . . ."

He made no answer to this. . . . Aunt Feddy sat up. Martin thought he heard her catch her breath. . . . He stepped into the room. . . . He wanted to kneel by the bed-side, to throw his arms about her, to talk to her about Madeline.

"Remember Dick Burtis, don't you, Martin?"

He would make no reply to this either. It was not like Aunt Feddy. He waited. . . .

"Do you know who called up here for you tonight?..." She did not wait for him to answer. "Jim Sanderson . . . the gambler Now what does he want with you?" "I don't know," said Martin. "A friend of mine down town told me he wanted to see me. But I don't know what it is. . . . I don't go round The Stag much since I quit doing baseball. What if he does want to see me? I'm a newspaper man, ain't I?"

His aunt sniffed. "Well, what if you are? And don't say 'ain't.' Do you reckon I want my nephew to become an alley-cat?..." She laughed despite herself.... "Come here and kiss me good-night."

He kissed her. . . . "I am a newspaper man, am I not?" he said.

Chapter X

HE Acre, referred to by Martin's aunt, was Carrolton's restricted district. Years ago, in one of his speeches, W. T. Sterrett had called it "Hell's Half-Acre" and the name had stuck. A half-acre did not nearly embrace its area, and the phrase was not original with Mr. Sterrett. Other towns, further West, further South, and in the East, called their red-light district the same thing, yet Carrolton, or a part of it, felt that the designation was unique. They used the full title, "Hell's Half-Acre," and were a little proud of it. This element embraced the good women of the town and those men who for reasons best known to themselves did not find it expedient or necessary to visit the district. The other element, that is to say, the women not so good and those men who for reasons best known to themselves did find it expedient or necessary to visit the district, referred to it casually as the Acre and knew by hearsay, if not through travel, that Mr. Sterrett in so naming it had not been inspired. They knew, also, although it was a conviction difficult of expression, that Mr. Sterrett had, deep within his brain somewhere, thoughts that terrified him, thoughts which, inflaming his mind, although mind is possibly not the word, stirred him to cry out against the world as one vast bawdy house. . . . Mr. Sterrett had never married. He had taught first, as a young man, in the ward schools, and later at the high school, as principal. And

always, it seemed to Carrolton, at the Baptist Sunday School. And now, approaching fifty, and still unmarried, he was superintendent of all the schools. As respite from his scholastic duties he lectured. On Sundays he was a lay preacher in churches of all Protestant denominations, discriminating against none. . . . Summer-time he toured the State, speaking, as Shirley had explained to Martin, in things called tabernacles. . . . He was good copy. Frequently he used words and phrases which the newspapers seized upon eagerly and salaciously, careful only that proof-readers were mindful of the quotes. From Mr. Sterrett's narrow though not unmuscular shoulders they hurdled the barriers of convention and presented raw to their readers, not as the headlines said, "Evils of the Underworld as Seen by State Reformer," but a maniac's glorification of sex wherein the public wallowed, searching avidly for phrases about which, pausing and reading twice, they might say with a chuckle, although chuckle may not be the word, "Here's a hot one. . . . Just listen to this!"

The Carrolton police raided the Acre regularly, once a month. Arrests were made technically, which is another way of saying that arrests were not made. Inasmuch as, according to tradition, Madams arraigned in Police Court before Judge Brice found it convenient to plead guilty and pay their fines on the spot—in cash—tradition had so arranged it that it was no longer necessary for them to come to court. Court went to them. On the Saturday night nearest the first of the month a squad of police under Chief Hutton made the rounds of the houses and assessed fines on all the inmates thereof; and on Monday morning the City Clerk entered a record of the trans-

action, crediting to the city treasury \$15.75 per woman, which represented a fine of one dollar "and costs" each, for admitted violation of the city ordinances making it a misdemeanor to maintain a house of ill-fame within the corporate limits. . . .

No names were entered on the police docket, and no Madam or her girls received a receipt. The City of Carrolton seemed content with the amount credited . . . and if, as it occurred to Martin Lavery soon after he began work as a reporter, there was a discrepancy between the amount on the books and the amount handed to Hutton and his men, that, as Shirley had said about other matters, was not ready to be spilled.

II

A great many things in Carrolton were not ready to be spilled, and Martin, now getting fifteen dollars a week, often thought about them as he made his rounds. . . . Hugh Mattison, the big faker. He had been County Attorney four terms, and he was always raiding something, but not the Stag Saloon. He gambled himself.

Martin had seen him often, but, being a cub, had never interviewed him or covered any of his political speeches. He was large and florid and an Elk; and like Martin's brother-in-law his hair was cut Southern-Congressman style. His picture belonged in a book on character reading, beneath it the words, "Note brow, chin and expression. This is the face of eloquence. . ." He loved horses, women, baseball, good whiskey and oratory. . . .

And Mayor Haward. The Mayor's office, unlike any other in the City Hall, had a carpet. There were cuspidors, as large though not quite as resplendent as those at the Stag. From ten in the morning until three in the afternoon the Mayor sat with his hat on, one hand trailing over the arm of his swivel chair, ashes from his cigar falling of their own weight on a rubber pad designed to go under a cuspidor but which for some reason was never put there. Some day, so Mayor Haward told Martin, he, Mayor Haward, was going to Congress. . . . So he sat all day and thought about it, smoking his cigar down to a nubbin which he could scarcely clench between his teeth. . . . The nubbin had a little crater in it. . . . and Mayor Haward had a cigar breath. Occasionally Martin bought him a drink; sometimes the Mayor bought. . .

Jim Hutton, the Chief of Police. He was fat and redcheeked, and drove around in a shiny runabout behind a sorrel stallion. The sorrel was as sleek as his master if not quite so fat, and somehow they went together. They suggested, both of them, that females had one function to fulfil and that males, whether in a uniform or between shafts, could be urbane in public, but when aroused. . . . It was understood that Jim kept a woman somewhere. . . . He was a bachelor. Martin pictured the woman as a heavy blonde with high-busted corsets over the ridges of which her shirt-waist broke at an angle. . . . Jim would like such a woman; but he would want her laced tight when dressed up, so she laced tight; and when she undressed her torso would be covered with the tracery of stays and strings, as a hand is after the owner has pressed it against the grass.

Denny Slade, who had the night desk at headquarters. Denny had killed two men, a negro who ran, resisting arrest, and a white man who kept a restaurant on lower Main Street. Martin had not witnessed either killing, but he had seen Denny directly after the last one, the white man. . . Denny sat on the bench where Martin often sat, and they were fanning him. He was green white. They gave him water from the cooler, and, later, brandy. He was in a cold sweat and trembling. . . . His gun, with which he had shot the restaurant keeper through the heart, lay on the desk near the police blotter. It was in the holster and the holster was slick and, in spots, black from sweat.

"I didn't want to kill him," Denny kept saying. . . . "It wasn't the two bits. . . . Hell, what do I care for two bits? But when he made a pass at me with that knife what could I do but shoot? And I meant to wound him then. . . ."

Nobody said anything.

It had happened Sunday morning. Saturday was Denny's night off then. He had entered the restaurant about nine with a hang-over and ordered strawberries and cream.

"You mean real cream?" asked the man.

"What in hell you reckon I mean?... What sort of Goddam question is that?..."

"Twenty-five cents," said the man, when Denny had finished the berries.

"Two bits for strawberries! Fifteen cents is the price.

Look at your bill of fare. . . ."

"You wanted real cream, and you've had it. . . . I can't make a profit on strawberries and real cream at

fifteen cents. . . You ought to know that, Mr. Slade."

"I guess I did cuss him a little," said Denny. . . . He got up off the bench. . . "Who's got my hat? . . . " He began strapping his gun on . . . "Hell, I didn't want to kill him, but when he came runnin' at me with a knife. . . . Where is he? . . . "Over at Hudson's," said somebody. . . . "You'd better take the day off, Denny. You're all nervous."

And Martin's first suicide. He rode with Joe Clack, on the patrol wagon. The City had no ambulance. The coroner followed in a buggy. The patrol wagon drove in an alley and stopped. Martin and Joe got out and entered a back yard. It had been snowing a little. Lying in the snow was a young man with a small black moustache. He had cut his throat with a razor, and he was already cold. . . . When the coroner came he went through his pockets and found part of a plug of tobacco and a half empty sack of Bull Durham. He handed these to Martin. "You can have 'em," he said.

An old woman came out of the house. "It was me who telephoned," she said. . . . "He's my nephew . . . but I can't bury him. . . ." She came and stood, looking down at the body. . . . "Wonder where he got that razor? . . ." Presently she said, "He was wanted in Alabama for something. He never told me just what. But the police were after him. . . . I guess it sort of worried him. . . ."

And this: From police headquarters, running after the patrol wagon which had got away ahead of him, Martin went breathless down into the Acre. Conrad Lyle, as City Physician, followed, whipping a black horse which pulled

his physician's phaeton rockingly. . . . It was a woman this time, a girl. She lay in the back yard at Pearl Beebe's. She had taken carbolic and was still alive. "Funny," thought Martin, "you somehow never think of such a place as having a back yard and grass, but this one has! . . ."

The girl lay on tender green grass, frothing from blue lips. . . . She thrashed about. From pain, and, it seemed to Martin, a determination to die, she resisted all of Conrad's efforts to pry a gag between her teeth. . . . The milk and alcohol which he tried to pour into her only spilled over her face and down her full wrapper . . . and she died, one hand plucking the grass, the other, and strangely, it seemed to Martin, resting perfectly still at her side. . . .

And the negress whose breasts Conrad sewed up. They did this, Martin assisting, in a small room at headquarters. The negress dripped, so that you could hear her out in the corridor. She was as black as ebony and nearly six feet tall. She had been to a negro picnic, and a rival had slashed her diagonally across the bosom with a razor. One breast was split wide open and fell apart like a melon, and the wound extended for fourteen inches across her upper body and abdomen.

Sitting bolt upright, her dress held to her as a sponge, the negress moaned faintly and said nothing.

"I can't chloroform you here," said Conrad. "Can you stand it? . . . Take your hands down and let me see. . . . Who cut you, anyway? Don't you know it's nearly midnight and I ought to be in bed? . . ."

"A fren' cut me. I cudden help it." She bent her head, as a man would trying to see his necktie, eyeing the

wound. . . . "Sew me up, please, Mister. Ahm cut bad. One breas' is ruint."

Without the use of an anæsthetic Conrad sewed her up, seventy-three stitches.

He stood back, holding his bloody hands from him, wrists drooping, sideways. He was tired.

Martin put down the tin basin he had been holding, full of bloody water.

"My God," said Conrad suddenly. "I forgot to leave a drain. . . . Hold on a minute, there, woman, I've got to fix something."

The negress sank back in the chair. . . . "Don't sew me much longer, please doctor. . . ."

Carefully Conrad began picking the stitches out. . . .

* * *

He had written these, all of them. . . . He laughed. "Christ, I'm not rebellious. . . . They don't want it as I see it. I gave them middle ground. Facts, facts, yes. . . . I alleged. I wrote all around the core, saying everything and nothing. I left the heart, the truth, untouched. 'Allege, allege' . . . It's understood. . . . The Star's informed. . . . Officer Slade Shooting in Self-defence Kills Main Street Restaurant Keeper. . . Girl in the Acre Dies of Carbolic Acid Refusing Doctor's Aid. . . . Mayor Haward May Announce Congress Candidacy Soon. . . . Chief Hutton Leaves for Washington to Attend White Slave Confab. . . . Young Man Cuts Throat on South Side—Police Say He Fled Alabama. . . . Dr. Lyle Gives Quick Aid to Wounded Negress! . . ."

"Well, what of it?" He spoke aloud. . . . "You're

like Sterrett. . . . You're enraged at yourself and you want to take it out on the world. . . . Keep your shirt on and shut up. Be calm." He was not a realist, anyway. . . . He was an idealist, a romanticist. . . . Which was he? . . . He was given to coarse similes and yet he loved truth and beauty. . . . Truth, hell! He lied even to himself. . . . Beauty!

Anyway he was a good reporter. . . . He would be a better one as time went on, and then he would be a great editor. He would marry Madeline. He would own and edit the *Star*.

He would print the truth then. He could do it, because he could tell truth from fraud instinctively, and he would employ intelligent reporters whose impressions could be relied on. . . . Meanwhile he would find peace in the realization that he knew the truth even though it were unexpressed. . . . He would continue to report fires, murders, City Council meetings, the Woman's Civic Club, sermons, suicides and the deaths of little negro children, who, dressed only in a cotton shirt, got too near the boiler while their mothers washed the white folks clothes. . . . He would give them middle ground, the best that was in him, pictures where possible, truth where possible, but all the truth, never. It was impossible. Deep in his mind, however, he would keep these pictures . . . Nobody could take them from him. . . .

III

As he entered the *Star* office Shirley stopped clipping the morning paper and looked up at him. "Jim Sanderson tried to get you twice yesterday," he said.

"I finally got the message, out at the house," said Martin. "If it's baseball, why doesn't he give it to Mrs. Allen?"

"It isn't," said Shirley crisply. "He called again this morning. He wants you to go to see his daughter."

Martin sat on the edge of a desk and swung his leg. Since he had been taken off baseball he had drifted into the Stag only a few times, and never, notwithstanding Sanderson's cordiality on the occasion of his first visit, had Martin asked to see him. Several times he had nodded, casually. He was a little ashamed. He had never called on Vada.

Shirley laughed. "Go now, if you want to. Take an hour off. She's worth looking at." He grinned. "She's literary, too."

Martin sniffed. "What does that mean?"

"She wants to be City Librarian," said Shirley. "And I think she thinks you can help her, your aunt being chairman of the board."

"I'd like to help her daddy first," said Martin slowly. "I could help him a lot . . . with a good story about his partnership with the County Attorney."

Shirley leaned way back in his chair. "Hell's bells," he sighed. He got up suddenly and pulled down his vest. "Yes, I know. And you'd like to help Sterrett, too. . . . With a good story about whipping in the public schools, and Miss Dalton's dismissal without a hearing . . . her resignation, you might say, which the *Star* did not print."

"Yes," said Martin, "I would."

"And bust up the City Administration," said Shirley. He raised his fist. "Good God, Martin, don't you suppose I see it? I hate 'em as you do. But, man, we've got to wait."

He paused, smiling:

"Go on now and see that girl. It'll do you good."



Book II Paradise and Pixies



BOOK II

Chapter I

ARTIN carefully closed the gate, lifting it slightly, and pushing it, until the latch clicked. It was not a dilapidated gate, but the hinges were rusty, as most gate hinges are, and they squeaked. . . . Martin thought about it, his closing a gate precisely, actually waiting until he heard the click. He reflected, "We perform trivial acts with exaggerated fastidiousness when we are engaged in or approach drama consciously. Men under stress and trying to hide it turn from those up-sidedown water bottles and drink mincingly, like birds; and they sharpen pencils with their eyes fixed on the operation, as though it were important not to break a shaving. . . . And then, looking up suddenly, they say 'Well, I'm sorry,' or, 'I knew this would happen sooner or later.' . . . Lemp will do something like this when he fires me. Very likely he will pick up a copy of the Star and pretend to study the front page and say, 'I'm sorry, Lavery . . . but that's how we feel about it. . . . I'm sorry."

He moved on up the walk. "That was a little crazy," he reflected, "analyzing why we close gates carefully and seeing Lemp fire me. We have never had an unpleasant word. As a matter of fact, he seems to like my work as a reporter. . . ."

He rang, that is to say, he pushed a button; he could

hear nothing. He stood gazing down at the door-mat. It was brown and not flush against the door-sill, and in the center the fibers were worn and flattened like an old scrubbing brush.

He rang again, pushing harder this time, until the blood drained out of his finger-tip. . . . The door-mat rather annoyed him. . . . He wanted to kick it . . . but did not. He moved it, fastidiously, with his toe, trying to make it even with the door sill—exactly even, using only his toe. It would not be fair to stoop and use his hands.

They were a long time in answering the bell. . . . "No," he corrected. "It is a matter of seconds really. I have not got out a card yet." He would do this now, take a card out of his case and peel off the little piece of tissue paper, blow it away possibly, or, more probably, lift its corner by blowing and roll it into a tight little ball and drop it at his feet. Not throw it, just drop it. . . . He did this, aiming it toward a crack, which it missed. It struck noiselessly and with such lightness that it seemed almost as if gravity were not interested. . . . Martin watched it, a tiny, gray fleck. . . . If someone did not come in a moment he would stoop and pick it up. . . . It could be smoothed out again, not perfectly, of course, but it could be laid in the palm and unrolled and then ironed with his finger. . . .

A thin negro woman opened the door. Without handing her his card Martin said, "Is Miss Sanderson in? I've come to see her. . . ."

"Yes, she's in."

The negress opened the door a little wider so that he might enter. When he had stepped into the hall she shut the door firmly and started to go upstairs. . . . She

stopped at the first step, one foot on it. "If you'll jes' set down, please, I'll go tell her. . . ."

"You might tell her who," said Martin. He stood, his hat in his left hand, smiling at her, his card between his free thumb and forefinger. The negress paused. . . . "Say it's Mr. Lavery, if you will," said Martin. "Martin Lavery. . . ." He would not hand the negress his card. . . . She would hold it close to her eyes and mumble over it all the way upstairs. This was quicker. , . . He waited, standing. . . .

His pulse quickened. He stroked the back of his head, pressing the hair at the nape of the neck. . . . He flirted the lapels of his coat, and settled the garment behind, about the collar. He had on his brown suit. It was a trifle shiny these days, not noticeably shabby, but the nap was nearly all gone from around the cuffs and from the trousers, at the seat. . . . He looked down his coat, liftit again at the collar, and, in front, touching the lower corners. . . . The suit was well-pressed; and his hair had been cut within a week. He was glad. . . . He tightened his neck-tie, lifting his chin and weaving his neck; and then, gravely, he inspected his hands, holding their backs from him, fingers outspread. . . . They were clean. . . . She would be down in a moment, Vada, Vada. The first time he had seen her since that Saturday in June . . . June 1893.

He was excited. . . . She would appear now in a second. . . . He looked up the stairs and then, quickly, about the hall. . . . There should be appropriate background . . . to indicate that she was vivid and well-bred—books, a picture, or pictures, showing good taste and intelligence . . . an exquisitely wrought statuette, a bust

... something. Swiftly, twenty years from this moment, he was writing of it, her coming down the stairs, her greeting, his greeting. There would have to be some background. She was a gambler's daughter but she must be wonderful and vivid, like the one pup in a litter about which you said instantly, "I'll take that one." That would not do. Vada was an only child. . . . And the hall where he stood was characterless; a carpet which had no color, a hat rack of imitation oak, a chandelier with a square globe, directly over the foot of the stairs, and, extending up the stairs into gloom a dark balustrade of morticed pieces, whose joints halfway up were visible. . . . There would be a distinctive room somewhere, though. She liked books. He would make her vivid and unusual. He pondered. "God, it's funny how badly I want her to stand up in the rôle I've pictured for her. That is because, probably, she made such an impression on me as a child. . . . I don't really give a damn. Until her father asked me to see her about the library I did not even trouble to call. . . . Madeline did that. I could not trust myself to get interested in a girl like Vada . . . and I knew that Madeline would be shocked. My associating with Jim Sanderson's daughter she would never understand. But I am glad now that I have come. . . . I hope she is wonderful and beautiful and intelligent." He clenched his hands. "I hope to God she is!" He laughed. "I hope she has a marvellous mind and no morals. None as concerns me. With others, yes, strict as hell, but with me-none. . . . "

She was coming now. He could hear a door close upstairs. "Ridiculous and almost tragic," he thought, "my investing her with attributes she will not have at

all.... She wants to be City Librarian.... She may wear glasses...." And yet Shirley and his sister had said she was beautiful, and Hugh Mattison was mad about her....

"Hello." . . . She called before he could see her. He could see only a hand, trailing along the dark banister.

"How do you do," said Martin. He stood at the foot of the stairs, blocking them, so that when she stopped it was on the lower step, where the negress had paused.

His first impulse was to take her under both arms and carry her swiftly into the light and set her down rather forcibly. He would say then, "Just stand and let me look at you. . . . Open your eyes. . . . Now shut them. . . . Raise your arms now. Walk a little. Speak, I want to hear your voice. Don't say, 'A-ah.' I don't want to see your tonsils. I want to see your mind. Say something. Answer this: Denny Slade, at headquarters, wears suspenders. They are labelled, stamped plainly on a triangular piece of nickel, only it's probably tin, not nickel, but they are stamped plainly, 'Police Suspenders.' That pleases me. A policeman actually wears police suspenders. It makes me laugh. It is something come true. . . . Now answer me this: Does it make you laugh? And do you understand utterly why I want something to come true? If you do, and can see it instantly, then you are a woman after my own heart, only that is a poor line, but you are the woman I want and I am going to have you. . . ."

He was trembling a little as he looked up at her. . . . "I am Martin Lavery," he said. . . . Something like a flash-light seemed to be going off in his brain. Silken

cords threaded through the tissues of his abdomen and down his spine were being withdrawn, without pain. . . . "She is that woman," he thought. . . . "She has that look. . . . I could do that, lift her and say those things I have just said, and she would understand. . . . She would laugh and understand. . . ."

Apparently she had said several things. . . . She was laughing, and her voice was very pretty to hear. "I knew who you were at once," she was saying, "but I'm afraid Papa made you come. . . . I tried to make him promise not to ask you, but he just would. . . . Let's go in here. . . ."

He was following her down the hall. "Papa." That was funny. Jim Sanderson, "Papa." . . . She moved rhythmically, a few feet in advance of him. "Not hippy," thought Martin. "Jealous women would call it that, her walk, but it is not. There is a lilt and swing to it . . . sexy, but not ordinary. She *is* wonderful. . . ." His eyes measured her. . . . "Nearly as tall as I am. . . . An inch shorter perhaps."

She stepped down into a room, lower than the rest of the house, a sort of lean-to, and faced about suddenly. His heart gave a great bound. Here was that room. There was background. He knew now surely. What had been a blinding flash as he looked up at her in the hall had become a clear white light and sustained. . . . Her skin was like ivory, her hair jet black, like her father's. . . She laughed again, not titteringly, but serene and pleasant. . . . They sat.

"You came about the library," she began. Her eyes rested on his, as serene as her laugh, and yet they glowed. They were deep brown, velvety, but, strangely, they

seemed to be no larger than when he had noticed them as a child beside the tree. . . Perhaps eyes did not grow; tiny children's ears were large and seemed to remain unchanged. . . Girls developed mostly at the bust. . . Nature blowing gently. His eyes touched her swiftly and then moved. No, God, why paw her already. . . Jim, "Papa," had sent her to a convent for a while.

And her eyes. . . . "Soulful would be a travesty. They see. That's it. In and out at the same time. I could devour—all of her."

Her waist was open at the throat, a white waist, tucked in at the throat, pinned possibly although no pins were visible. "Not like a school teacher's on a hot day," thought Martin. "That suggests prickly heat and loose strands of hair, moist with perspiration, which irritate. . . . Rather as a nymph would do it, to please herself. Surely a nymph would please herself. As she would do it, with leaves or flowers, or if she wore clothes, and particularly after her bath. . . . This girl had just bathed. . . . She looks so clean."

"Yes," said Martin. . . . His own voice sounded strange. . . . Yes, he knew about the library situation. His aunt was still a member of the Board, although no longer Chairman. He would be awfully glad to talk to his aunt about it.

"Do you remember me, years ago?" he asked abruptly. Her eyes touched his. . . . They said, "Why?" "I think I do," came her voice. . . . "I'm not sure."

Martin searched her face. "She does remember. She remembers the picnic." He was suddenly angry inside. He wanted to mention the picnic but something held him

back. "Damn! Here I say she is that woman, and yet I keep still."

"I hope you understand that if they give me the library it won't be a favor. I don't want a favor, and it isn't the money," said Vada.

"You think it will be doing them a favor."

"That's it," said Vada. She did not laugh; her eyes seemed to glow more intensely. "I love books. I think I could improve the library . . . maybe the town. . . ." She looked at him, swallowing, her throat swelling and falling like the throat of a drinking bird.

"I can tell you mean that," said Martin. . . . "I feel that way about some things too. How old are you, Vada?"

He was glad he had called her Vada, glad immediately, because it gave him relief. His eyes searched hers for resentment. . . . There was none. "And that makes me glad, too," he thought. "Of all things I would not want to be considered fresh. . . ."

"Eighteen," said Vada. . . . "How old are you?"

"Nearly twenty," he answered. He paused....
"Sometimes I feel two hundred, and sometimes two...."
He was sorry instantly he said this. It was not clever;
it was callow cynicism.

"And how old do you feel now?" Her eyes seemed to reach right through him, playing like a finger of light, at the back of his mind.

"You win," he said.... "I deserved that." He laughed with frank relief. "I feel very young with you... and old. That is not offered as an epigram but as truth.... I like truth.... Possibly that is why I lie so much."

"You don't look like a liar," she observed simply.

"But I am. . . ." He wished that she would smile. . . . It was difficult to tell how much of her was banter.

"For example, what sort of lies?" She shifted her body in her chair as if, having asked that question gravely, she expected a grave and perhaps a long reply.

Martin felt uncomfortable. . . . He shifted his position slightly. The posture she had assumed showed her lines superbly. . . . She was slenderer than Madeline and more fragile, and yet she suggested great vitality. Even her ivory pallor suggested this.

Martin studied her, his mind spinning. . . . "She has the look of a Kentucky beauty before the war and the atmosphere of a Trilby. Only she is a nymph now, playing with her thoughts, leaving them open at the throat when she desires. Later she will have other playthings and she will not be so pallid. And she will be a trifle plumper, although plump will never describe her. Never as I see her will she be fat."

But he must answer her— What did he lie about?

"For example, you," he said, settling himself back in his chair, which, being wicker, made sleek grassy noises.

She raised her eyebrows slightly. "Ye-es?" The faintest note of disappointment.

Martin's heart sank. He was making a fool of himself. He bent forward. "I meant that. I lie to myself about every attractive thing, everything that attracts me." He paused and looked at her, half pleadingly.

Vada laughed. "Me? . . . Jim Sanderson's daughter . . . the gambler's gal? You couldn't have been greatly attracted or you would have called before. Papa said he invited you weeks ago."

"I hardly knew you," faltered Martin.

"You asked me a while ago if I remembered you as a child. Well, I do. I know what you remember too. I remember your standing there by the tree." The color came into her cheeks. "I remember a great many things." She looked at him gravely. "This isn't the Sanderson home. This is where Jim Sanderson and his daughter live."

"Oh, no," said Martin. "I'm sure they don't say that." His voice was too emphatic.

"But they do," said Vada quietly.

There was an awkward pause. "You'll get the library position some day," said Martin. "I wouldn't worry. I'll do all I can." He smiled.

Vada smiled. "I hear that you are literary."

"Hell, no," said Martin.

Vada's eyes widened with pleasure. "I feel that way too," she said. "That's why I want to be librarian."

Martin got out of his chair, laughing. "I like you for that," he said. He held out his hand. "I'd like awfully to call again, a lot of times, if you'll let me. . . . May I? I've got to get back to the office now."

"You may," said Vada.

* * *

He would help this girl; he was sorry for her. . . . And she was wonderful. Jim Sanderson's daughter. Suddenly Martin was unhappy. Jim had stopped Hugh Mattison's attentions. Vada was too young. More than that: Jim could see clearly Hugh's mind; he could see all men's minds, and yet he had maneuvered this call. He must have had some motive other than the library.

... What did Jim care about the library? He wanted him to become interested in Vada, to marry her. . . . Martin was pleased. Jim knew men and yet he had asked him to visit his daughter, and she was alone in the house except for a servant. . . . Martin was horribly depressed. "He trusted me and now I picture his daughter as mine. Yes, I do. I should like her as my mistress. . . . Madeline for my wife, Vada for my mistress. . . . " Lines came to him. . . . "One to bear my children and my name, one to share my burdens and my shame. . . ."

He repeated the words two or three times. He was nearing the office. "You mushy fool," he grinned.

Chapter II

N December, either on the Friday night before or on the Friday night after Christmas, the Sans Pareils gave their big dance. There was an orchestra of six pieces, and mistletoe, under which girls chattered banteringly and were not kissed. Obeying the club rule, the young men wore swallowtails or tuxedos, mostly rented, and carried two extra handkerchiefs, making three in all, one for normal usage, one to wipe their patent leather shoes with, one to tuck between their high collars and their necks, if perspiration made this necessary. This year the dance came on the Friday before Christmas.

In summer the Sans Pareils gave their affairs in a pavilion on an artificial lake four miles from town, whereto the dancers journeyed by trolley; but in winter the dances were held in Scovil Hall, on Main Street, one flight up and nearly opposite the Stag Saloon. People going up and down the street on the farther sidewalk could see the heads and shoulders of the dancers, and, in snatches, their waists, but not their feet; so to those who stopped and looked, hearing the orchestra fitfully, it was something like watching heads and torsos dancing to imaginary music.

This is the way it seemed to Martin in any event, and as he dressed he could see himself dancing, only Madeline's body held to him. They floated, only their bodies together. "And we do not need bodies," he thought. "I do not love Madeline's body. I love Vada's body. I

love all of Vada. I find in her everything, in Madeline not everything, but something finer. That is why, possibly, I love her. I love her, and I crave Vada. . . ."

It was strange, his being interested in two girls at the same time, loving one and craving the other. . . . "No," thought Martin. "It is very natural. With Madeline I want to be the coal-heaver bending over the buttercup, with Vada the genius wallowing in the brothel. . . . As a matter of fact neither of them has the attributes I invest them with, not wholly, anyway. What I should like to do if I could is to meld them, although that word suggests saloon back rooms and pretzels; blend them into one, using this of Madeline and that of Vada. . . . " This was fascinating. He would construct a perfect woman, just as some day he would evolve a perfect idea, something which, meeting all tests, hammered, beaten, seared, screamed at, rolled over and over in the gutter, would get on its feet and dust itself off and smile, saying, "I don't think I'm hurt. . . ." His ideal woman would be like that. . . . He would not treat her that way, of course. Or possibly he would. . . . Anyway, she would always get up. . . . Not dust herself off. . . . She would bathe and put on fresh linen. . . .

He could see her plainly now, his composite woman.
... This was better. He would begin with her body.
Why not? She had to have a body. ... He would dress her later, gloriously. ... Somewhere in his brain there was just the word for the first garment she would slip on. ...

He sat watching her at her bath in a chair in the room adjoining. A comfortable chair. She had left the door open, half-open, so that, looking, he could see her, and, if he moved his chair a little, also flashes of her in a mirror. . . . Her skin glowed . . . not really red anywhere and not pink. . . . His eyes moved over her slowly. . . . There was no color for it. The poets had failed: woman's flesh was not pink. . . . It was blood beneath white skin, blood coursing beneath white skin.

He smiled as he gazed at her. She was his. Why should he not look at her? She knew he was looking at her. Purposely, so that he might look—so that he would look-she had left the door open. She was conscious of his gaze as she dried herself, half-shielded, not because of modesty, although partly so, but because half-shielded she was more alluring. . . . She would smile in a moment now, look up and smile. . . . Smile and look halfstartled, vet pleased, as though saving, "This is shameful! I had no idea you were sitting there." Her motions were graceful. . . . He smiled. If he were not looking she would stand close to the mirror, gazing gravely at her firm body and her breasts, or she would raise them gently with her hands. Even young girls did this, and flabby matrons. They did it wistfully, the matrons, gazing from them thus supported to their lifted image in the glass. "Christ," said Martin, "there's tragedy, firm once, with blood beating in them. Brown circles now, breasts flat and hanging. . . ."

An old man was saying, "You leave umbrellas here." The old man had watery grey eyes and a grey uniform, and some sort of a badge on his coat. "I hate umbrellas," thought Martin. "But I seem to have had one that day. . . ." He gave it to the old man and moved across alternate blue and white stones, a marble checker board. . . . It was clear now. Rodin's Old Courtesan at the

Metropolitan. "That was during my first Christmas vacation from college," thought Martin. "Her breasts, the statue's, were awful. . . ."

He sat heavily down on the bed, holding his head between his hands. He felt tired. He would like a drink.

\mathbf{II}

He was to call for Madeline in a hack. It was possibly fifteen blocks from the Wynne's home to Scovil Hall, too far for Madeline to walk in slippers; and besides it was customary to use hacks at these holiday dances. Riding in a hack to the Christmas dance was as canonical as wearing evening clothes. . . . And yet Martin did not have on his dinner coat. He had on his black suit, carefully pressed. His shirt was white. He had pulled his tie so tight that the veins stood out on his neck and at the sides of his forehead, and as he rode toward the Wynne's seated alone in the broad seat of the open vehicle, he kept pressing his hand to his temples. He liked to feel that this squeezed the blood out, relieving congestion. He always had this congested feeling whenever his mind skipped about. "And I always want a drink," he thought. "I would really like to get drunk now. But I do not want liquor on my breath when I am with Madeline. . . . " He pondered his respect for this girl of seventeen. He was happy at the thought of being with her. He loved her, and purely. He would never think of her body. . . . He would think of Vada's though. . . . He pondered. This was so wrong. As far as he knew Vada was as pure as Madeline. He had never kissed her either. In some ways she was more wonderful than Madeline, in many ways. She had more brains: she knew. "That fascinates me," he thought. "I know she knows. She has thoughts, as I do. She sees everything. When people talk she sits, not hearing what they say but more than they say, touching the backs of their minds. . . . She too would like to write. Some day she may. She will do it more surely than I will. She will not tire herself as I do and will not drink . . . or do other things. . . . At any rate I do not think she will. . . . She may. . . ." He would continue seeing Vada as he had been doing since that first call, averaging two nights a week. He would not tell Madeline. And he would say nothing to Vada about Madeline. Perhaps Vada knew; Madeline did not. . . . And some day Vada would be his. . . .

The first thing that Mrs. Wynne said as Martin entered the hall, was, "Why, Martin, where's your dress suit?"

Madeline turned about from the hall mirror before which she was adjusting a shimmery veil-like something over her hair. Her mouth opened a little. It was a pretty mouth, but not like Vada's. It was smaller.

"Martha let a hot iron stand on the coat and burnt a hole in the sleeve," said Martin. "This suit's all right. I'm sorry if you're embarrassed."

Martha was Aunt Feddy's cook.

"You'll be fined," said Madeline. "Five dollar fine." Martin buttoned his overcoat, his paddock. "We ought to be going," he said, "if we're going to have dinner first. . . ."

They were in the hack now, Martin on the right, Mrs. Wynne on the left, Madeline sitting a little forward and holding her veil, in the middle. . . . Mrs. Wynne always went to dances. Martin had asked her, casually, if she would like to come with them to the dinner, and promptly,

to his disappointment, she had accepted. "I knew she would come," he thought. "They would make it tragic, mother trailing along to dinner, but it is not. I expected it. And they would make it tragic, my pawning my tuxedo to pay for the dinner, but that is not either. . . . I could have borrowed the money. I wanted to pawn it. It pleased me. So I don't deserve any credit or pity. . . . The other fellows take these dances seriously. I don't. I simply want to be with this girl, whom I love."

The three of them sat at a small table in the corner of King's restaurant, across from the Opera House. There were table lights with fringed shades, more red than pink, and, in a vase which obstructed his view of Madeline's face, carnations. They were red. It was about a quarter to eight. The hack had dropped them and was coming back to take them to the dance. "About a quarter to nine," Martin had told the driver.

Martin's head throbbed. He looked at Madeline. Her blonde hair was done high, her eyes sparkled. Her breasts, fuller than Vada's, rose and sank in fascinating rhythm, and try as he might Martin could not but picture them as bare. The waist of her gown was fairly low-cut, low for a girl of her age, and to make this less daring she wore tulle drawn across the bodice, and, in the center, tucked in a little. "Her mother did that," thought Martin. "If she could, without being scandalous, she would have Madeline leave the tulle off. She would like to do more than that. If she could she would like to say 'Look, aren't they beautiful? See how soft her skin is. . . .'" Strangely he was not ashamed. . . . "I am ridiculing Mrs. Wynne," he thought, "I don't like her. I am mad because she is here. I am mad because she restrains my

relations with Madeline. . . . I am a liar. I do think it is tragic, her coming with us, and I'm another liar when I say it isn't tragic my pawning the tuxedo. It is tragic. . . . I am a fraud. . . . All I can do is rant, and then only to myself."

"Don't you feel well, Martin? You seem tired. Have you got a headache?"

Mrs. Wynne looked around the carnations and smiled. Though she was nearly fifty she was still slender, but she had a brisket.

Martin became suddenly enraged at her; her and her black dress. Unconsciously he pressed his hands against his forehead, and then he spoke. But first he pushed the carnations out of the way, tipping the vase so that the water spilled.

"No, I haven't a headache. I love Madeline. Maybe that's what you've noticed. I love her and I intend to marry her. . . . She loves me. . . . Don't you, Madeline?" His voice shook.

Madeline seemed unable to say anything. She looked at her mother.

Mrs. Wynne's brisket quivered. "Why, Martin Lavery, you talk crazy. . . . She's a baby. You're little more than a baby yourself. . . . It seems only yesterday that I saw you in short dresses. . . . Goodness gracious, Martin, don't lose your head." She began laughing nervously. "Let's have our supper now. . . ." She shot him an odd, disturbed glance and unfolded her napkin.

Martin sank back in his chair. He felt calmer. He spoke calmly: "Madeline, I have told your mother that you love me. I want you to tell her so. It doesn't mean marriage now. But tell her."

Madeline looked frightened. She caught her breath. Her eyes, first lowered, then raised to his said, "Please!"

Martin waited, his jaw muscles tightening. He would see it through now. It was baiting her, but he would see it through. It was cheap drama perhaps, but he would finish it. He would finish something. He had told this girl a thousand, a million times, that he loved her, and she had told him so. She did love him. He was sure of it. If it was cheap drama, telling her mother so, putting it open and above-board, then nothing in God's world was sincere. . . .

"Pshaw," said Mrs. Wynne. "Pshaw, Martin. Don't look so serious. Anybody would think you'd lost your last friend. . . . Of course Madeline likes you. And of course you like her. All the boys do. But she's too young to love anybody. . . . " Her tone altered slightly. . . . "You ought to know that; you're no child."

A waiter was putting olives on the table. They were in a cut-glass dish. Mrs. Wynne took one at once, handed Madeline one, as a hen would drop food before a wobbly chick. She clucked. The evening must be gay. There must be nothing disturbing. Madeline's hair looked well. Her dress looked well. Her slippers were beautiful. Clucking she smiled at Martin. She exchanged knowing glances with Madeline.

"She thinks I have been drinking," thought Martin. He looked at Madeline. Her face seemed drawn, and as she ate she lowered her eyes. . . . She did not eat. . . .

Mrs. Wynne could stand it no longer. She laid her napkin on the table. . . . None of them had scarcely eaten . . . "I think we might be going," she said. "It's

nearly half past eight, and it's better for us to be early than late. Madeline always has a great many boys to dance with and it's nice to get her card fixed early. . . . "

"The hack will be here at a quarter to nine," said

Martin. "We havn't had our salad yet."

"Couldn't you get one now?" said Mrs. Wynne.

"I could run around to The Stag. The stand's there." He began putting on his overcoat. . . . "I'll be back in a minute."

III

Madeline and her mother were a long time in the women's room. They were at Scovil Hall, and early. Only a few couples had arrived. There was corn-meal on the floor. Martin had checked his overcoat, receiving no check but leaving it with a negro, who folded it and patted it and put it on a chair. On a small table the negro had placed a saucer for tips. It was a dirty saucer. Martin lit a cigarette. He inhaled the smoke two or three times, deeply, then thwipped it from him, way across the room. He walked over and stepped on it, harder than was necessary, flattening it, tearing it open with a grinding motion. . . . He stood in the main hall now, waiting. . . . They were talking it over, of course. Possibly Madeline was crying. . . . He hoped she was. He watched the musicians. They were not tuning up. He laughed inwardly. "They should be tuning up. I should be standing here, torn with emotion, while the musicians tune their instruments. . . . But they are not. . . Only the drummer is doing anything, and he is not conscious of that." The drummer was very gently tapping with one stick the side of his

instrument. . . . Martin moved across the floor toward the front windows, overlooking Main Street. He stood looking. Almost directly opposite was The Stag. . . . "I want a drink," he thought. "I am crazy to-night, crazy and obscene." A wave of agony swept over him. . . . "I want to get drunk. I will get drunk, but not until after the dance. . . . I will slip over to The Stag once, though . . . and have one drink during an intermission. I've got to have a drink."

He was depressed, terrifically. . . . He was rotten. ... He was thinking of liquor and not of Madeline. He was losing Madeline; yes, he could feel it, she was gone. He loved her, but she would be taken from him. Her mother would fix that. He had frightened her mother. God damn her, what right had she to get so disturbed? He had told the truth. "And sincerely," he thought. . . . He had not moved that flower vase, fastidiously preparing the way for a studiedly dramatic declaration of his love. He had moved it swiftly, almost without knowing it. He had not known it, in fact, until the water spilled and some of it touched his hand. . . . He was pleased. . . . "That was honest," he thought. "I love her, and I was concerned only with telling her. ... I thought only of that. .. ." It was tragic, his dinner. Twelve dollars, and nobody had enjoyed it. He had ordered it carefully: turkey, candied sweet potatoes, cauliflower, lettuce-and-tomato salad with French dressing, ice cream and cake, coffee. The olives and celery and the carnations were extra. . . . He clenched his hands. "I am like a cheap clerk. Naming over the things we had to eat, naming them, especially the cauliflower, and saying, 'twelve dollars.' A clerk would say

that. He would say, 'Some feed I ordered. Set me back twelve bucks.' And I would be sorry for him. I would say, 'Poor dub, he doesn't know how tragic he is.' . . . But I'm not. Writing about it years from now, if I should, I could not make it tragic, without faking That is because I know. I can see it now. The clerk couldn't."

Madeline had been crying. . . . Martin could tell it at once. It gave him great joy in his heart. She loved him and had been crying over him. . . . But he was sorry for her. He whispered as he took her dance card. . . . "Forgive me. I love you, Madeline. . . . I had to tell your mother. . . ."

Madeline said nothing until he began making crosses, heavy ones, in the spaces of her dance card. He marked eight of them. Her eyes rested on him a moment. It seemed to Martin that there was pity in her look. She said: "That's too many, Martin. . . . You can have three. . . ."

"Three? Why, Madeline, three's nothing. . . . What's the matter? You always give me eight."

She held out her hand for the card. . . . She seemed very calm. It was as though she sniffed, saying, "You know what the matter is. Why do you ask and make it more painful? You, who think you know everything, why do you ask after what has occurred? . . ."

"Three," she repeated. . . . "You can have any three. . . ." She paused, her eyes on him, the card poised. . . .

"The first, the fifth, and the seventh," he said.

She marked them, making light crosses beside three of his heavy ones. . . .

He held her very lightly, as he always did. He could hear the music and he could not hear it. "I am in a daze," he thought. "Literally. I am keeping time, but that is not music. And this girl is not the girl I love. That girl is gone. I know it. She is gone forever. Faint heart, perhaps . . . but I know. . . . I am sick. I am crazy. . . . I do not blame Mrs. Wynne. . . . I am too old for Madeline, too tense, too queer. . . . She would never be happy with me and my moods. . . . Probably no good woman would. After this dance I will get a drink. . . ."

IV

He slipped out as soon as the second dance had started. He was bare-headed and without his overcoat. It was as though he had jumped the street at a bound. The Stag was full. Christmas week trade. . . . At the center of the bar was a big bowl of egg-nog which was being served in mugs. . . . Holly wreaths and mistletoe were banked back of the bar, against the mirrors. The cigar counter bore a sign, done elaborately in colored chalk in scrolly letters, MERRY CHRISTMAS. . . . Martin stood near it, at the left of the cigar counter. It made him want to cry. He could not tell why, but that sign stirred him deeply. It made him feel sorry for himself and the world, or enraged, he could not tell which. . . . "I am probably the most depraved person here and yet I want to cry over that sign," he thought. "I can see the man printing it. He is an old drunk. Bar rooms have ruined him. . . . But he prints signs for them. Goes from saloon to saloon and carefully prints 'Merry Christmas.' And possibly he letters mirrors and covers them with that stuff they use in summer to prevent fly specks. . . ."

"Give me a Scotch high-ball," he said. . . . The bartender was very busy. . . . He had several orders ahead. . . . Martin repeated his order. The man gave him a look. . . . Martin stepped back and moved toward the end of the bar. A knot of men had just gone, leaving a gap. . . . Jim Sanderson was standing there.

"Hello, Martin," he said. "Where's your hat?"

"Over across the street. There's a dance on. I slipped out for a drink. . . . Let me have a Scotch highball, will you?" addressing the bartender.

He was sorry he had said that, about the dance. . . . It was rubbing it in. Vada never went to these dances. ... It occurred to Martin that he was being cowardly in his relations with Vada. . . . He never took her anywhere. . . . He called and they spent hours talking, but when he went to places it was with Madeline. . . . He was uneasy. . . . Jim must be thinking this. . . . Martin felt himself wince. . . . Lucky Jim couldn't read his mind . . . his thoughts about Vada... What if he did? Jim knew life.... What did men think about women, anyway? When a woman was attractive physically what was it in the last analysis? If Jim asked him, he'd say so. He'd say, "Look here, Mr. Sanderson, you know the facts as well as I do. . . . You know your daughter's attractive physically. . . . You'd be disappointed if she wasn't. . . . What did you send her to a convent for?" "I'm a liar," he thought, "I won't say any such thing. . . . I tried once to-night saying what I felt. . . . " He turned to Jim, "I'm sorry I never could do anything about the library. . . ."

"Forget it," said Jim. "You tried, and I appreciate

it. . . . Vada likes you, Martin. . . . It's nice the way you are calling on her. . . ."

Martin set down his glass. . . . He was ashamed

and, in a vague way, frightened. . . .

Was Jim reaching at him? Was he going to say in a moment, "By the way, Martin, I'd like to have a little private talk with you. . . . Just step into my office a moment, will you?"

Martin picked up his change, which had been lying on the bar as he drank. . . . "To hell with it," he thought... "I've never tried to kiss her....
To hell with it..."

Suddenly Jim touched his shoulder. . . . "I'm glad you dropped over," he said. "Will you step in my office a minute? I want to see you about something. . . . "

This was real. . . . It was like a blow. "Certainly,"

said Martin. He spoke louder than he intended.

It was a small office, possibly not more than eight by eight. It was finished in mahogany and had a roll-top mahogany desk. There was a safe. On the safe door, in gilt letters, were the words, "J. F. Sanderson,—Private." Martin read the words. He was shaky, but he would read them. It was funny, putting "private" on a safe. He could see Jim inspecting the lettering the day it was done, touching it to see if it were dry, then standing back and looking at it, satisfied. . . . "Like a child carefully writing, more probably printing, its name in a new school book," he thought.

"Sit down," said Jim, "and try some of this." He lifted a bottle of old bourbon from the floor beside the desk and, with two glasses, placed it on a small mahogany table, beside which there was one chair. Martin sat in this. . . . Jim sat at his desk, in a swivel chair, with a black seat, wheeling about. . . . Martin carefully poured a drink. . . . He was afraid that his hand would shake, but it did not.

"I want to give you some baseball news," said Jim. Martin removed his hand from the glass, a tremendous

wave of relief sweeping over him.

"That's good," he said. "Any time. . . . But you

know I'm not doing baseball."

Jim laughed grimly. . . . "It isn't exactly baseball news. It's bigger than that. . . . It's about the ownership of the club. . . . I thought maybe I would give you a scoop. . . . It concerns me and Hugh Mattison."

Martin grew tense.

"Ever hear our names associated, Martin?" Jim leaned forward. Reaching from his chair, he poured himself a drink, a small one. "Just what have you heard? You won't hurt my feelings. . . . Tell me what you've heard."

Martin blew his breath over his upper lip. It was rather difficult to express. "Yes, I have heard something," he said. "When I first got back here I heard things. . . . That you were in partners. That's about it, I guess. . . . That you and Hugh owned the ball club. That Alderman Gleeson was supposed to own one half and you the other but that Hugh really owned Gleeson's part, which sort of made you two partners. . . ." He drank his drink at a gulp.

"Uh-huh. . . . Partners, eh? In the baseball business and in the gambling business. . . . That your understanding, too? And that's why I'm not raided, eh?"

"I guess so," said Martin. . . . "In a way. I never knew the facts."

"Well, it's a lie," said Jim. "He does own half the ball club. Bought it in nineteen-two. Got it from Gleeson, somehow. . . . But he doesn't own a nickel's worth of this place, and he never will. . . . Not as long as I run it. . . . He wants in on it. That's what he wants. . . . That's what my scoop's going to be about. . . . The point is, will you print it? Will they print my statement?"

Martin was trembling. . . . "Of course the Star'll print it. It's a whale of a story. . . ." He stopped, picked up his glass. "I think they will, Mr. Sanderson. . . . Listen. Make it an affidavit. . . .

They'll print that, surely. . . . "

"All right," said Jim. "I will. I'll go before a notary. . . . What's to-day? Friday. How'll Monday do? I'll go before a notary. . . I'll give you an affidavit. . . . Keep it quiet, Martin. I'll give it to you. Next week. . . ." He got up and stood looking at his safe. . . "Listen to this, Martin. I've told him if he ever comes raiding me here, I'll kill him. . . . They used to raid me, years ago, just as they raid the Acre now. Hugh Mattison has never tried to raid me. . . . He waited for this, I reckon. . . . Waited to be partners. . . "

Martin took a clove as he left. There were other spices in the glass receptacle on the bar, coffee, a dry green-brown root whose name he did not know, and, in another bowl, popcorn. He held the clove in his hand crossing

the street. He did not like men who chewed cloves after drinking. . . . He threw it away. He would smell of liquor, but not much. And it would be a fresh smell. . . . If he used the clove he would be a fraud. . . . He was not a fraud. . . . He had called himself one but he was not. . . . He laughed. "That's the booze. Only two drinks and I am not a fraud. . . ." He stood in the doorway, watching the dancers. He was glad now that he had spoken to Mrs. Wynne of his love for Madeline. "My affidavit," he thought. . . . "I'll swear to it. Yes. . . . Why shouldn't I tell her? I'm maudlin . . . two drinks and I'm maudlin. . . . Jim was maudlin, too. . . . Yes, he was. . . . And he was wistful . . . wistful when he spoke of Vada, when he said, 'It's nice the way you are calling on her'. . . . The hell it's nice. . . . I want to sleep with her. What would 'papa' think of that?... It's true, though. . . . I can't help it. . . . And it's true I love Madeline. . . . I can't help that. . . . It's wrong, though. . . . Mrs. Wynne says it is. . . . It's wrong, by God, for me to love her daughter. . . . Can you beat that? . . . wrong! It's all right for her to make a flirt of her. . . . That's fine. All right for her to advertise her, to show her off. . . . That's great. But for me to love her, to love her purely, to love her so much that I loathe myself for even thinking of her body. that's wrong. . . ."

He was swaying a little... He still stood in the doorway. . . . "I'm not drunk. . . . Hell, no. Fact is, I'm sober. I was drunk . . . and crazy. . . . But I'm sober now. . . . Jim's sober, too. Soberer than he has been in months. . . . He's going to make

his affidavit. . . . That's been on his mind. . . . He's relieved. . . . I know he is. . . . He's writing that affidavit now . . . not on paper, but he's saying, 'And I further charge . . . that said Hugh Mattison threatens to close my place of business unless I take him into partnership.' " Martin paused. . . "I don't know anything about affidavits . . . I can't recall ever having read one . . . " His eyes wandered over the dancing couples. They were fools . . . He searched out Madeline . . . Far off he saw her. She was dancing with Willis Bell . . . She passed Martin set his lips sardonically, gazing straight at her She seemed to look beyond, and through him Her brow contracted slightly

"Mrs. Wynne wants to see you. . . ." Charlie Stewart rested one arm against the side of the door jamb. . . . "Where's your tux, Martin? We'll have to fine you. . ."

"Go ahead," said Martin. "Next time I'll come naked. How much'll that cost?"

"What's eatin' you?" said Charlie. "You soused?"

"Never soberer in my life. . . . Where is Mrs. Wynne?"

"Over there," said Charlie, pointing.

Martin moved from the doorway, pausing, before threading his way through the dancers, as one pauses before plunging into traffic. . . . He weaved, dodging adroitly, running a few steps to avoid impact with a couple approaching back first. . . . Mrs. Wynne sat with a row of mothers, chaperons. . . .

"I think we'll go, Martin," she said, lowering her voice.
"Madeline doesn't feel well." She compressed her lips.
"I'm afraid you've upset her. . . ." She rose, letting

her gloves slide off her lap to the floor. . . . Martin picked them up "Any time," he said. . . . "I'm sorry."

V

Madeline went directly upstairs. . . . "Not slowly," thought Martin as his eyes followed her, "nor with bent head, nor rapidly as though to reach her room before the tears came. . . ." He stood looking up. . . . Surely she would pause once. . . . "Good-night," he called. . . . "Good-night," she answered, not turning her head. She did not add, "Martin."

Mrs. Wynne sat down on the steps. . . . The gas jet burned low. . . . "Turn it up a little, will you, Martin? And sit down a minute. I want to talk to you. . . ."

He sat on the bottom step, half facing her. . . . "I could say it for her," he thought, "all of it and then some. . . ."

"May I smoke?" he asked. As she nodded he took out a box of Rameses, tapped one end foremost on the box cover, lit it. . . .

"Martin, I'm going to be pretty frank," said Mrs. Wynne. "I wish you wouldn't see Madeline any more. . . You've upset her terribly. . . . You frighten her. She's too young for a serious love affair. . . ."

"I guess she is," said Martin. . . . "You see . . ."
"Have you been kissing her, Martin? Making mature love to her?" Mrs. Wynne spoke in a low voice.

He looked up. . . . His impulse was to throw his cigarette on the hall carpet, to spring up, shake his finger

in her face, to cry, "What in hell do you mean by mature love? You're evil, woman... You're terrible... You think I'm evil, and you're evil for thinking it..."

Instead he inhaled once, twice, three times, until his Rameses was hot.

"You're wrong there, Mrs. Wynne," he smiled. . . .
"I'll tell you something if I may. Of all the things in life, all of them, everything, one I have kept inviolate. Madeline. . . . I love her, Mrs. Wynne. She's God to me, God, truth, beauty, light, purity. . . . I wonder if you understand that? . . . Do you? Possibly that's mature love. . . . I'm nearly twenty now. Maybe it is. . . ." He was trembling.

"You're morbid, Martin. And you've been drinking.
. . . We came home because of that. . . . I might as well tell you. . . ." She tried to laugh, and when she spoke again, there was a gentler note in her voice. . . .
"Dr. Wynne drank. . . . You want to watch yourself, Martin. I know what it is. . . . If for no other reason than that I wouldn't want Madeline to love you."

"But she does. . . . Hasn't she told you so?" His voice was tense.

"Yes—she has. . . ." Mrs. Wynne stood up. "And just for that very reason I'm going to ask you this. . . . I'm going to ask you not to call again. I want you to promise me. She's a baby, Martin, and you are a man. . . . I know you're honorable, too. . . . So promise me."

He had risen too, and he stood eyeing her, teetering slightly back on his heels. . . . "Suppose she wants me to come? Sends for me?"

Mrs. Wynne laughed. "She won't, Martin. . . . I know her better than you do. But I'll be fair if you will. If she asks for you I'll let you know. I promise I will. . . . Now let's hear you promise."

"I promise," said Martin. "I'm sorry the evening was a failure. Good-night."

Very quietly he closed the door after him and walked swiftly along Sumner Street in the darkness, clenching his hands. "God above give me strength," he breathed. He laughed bitterly. "Where do I get off to ask God anything? . . . I'm rotten. . . ." He would get drunk, good and drunk. He would go down in the Acre . . . spend the night there. . . . No, he wouldn't. He would go home, to Aunt Feddy's. There was Jim's affidavit. Martin raised himself on his toes. There would be a thrill in that.

Some day he would be a great newspaper man, and the Wynnes would be sorry.

Chapter III

O town plans its red-light district. Carrolton did not plan the Acre. It grew, like a wart, and picking seemed to have no effect upon it whatever. Possibly picking is not the way to eradicate warts. In any event, neither W. T. Sterrett nor the memorials of the Women's Civic Club, or anything, seemed to bother the Acre much.

In the houses the charge for beer was one dollar for a pint bottle. If you specified you could have Pabst Blue Ribbon, Schlitz or Budweiser. If you did not specify you got simply beer. . . . The charge for girls ranged from one dollar to ten, and if you specified you could have Ruby or Mildred or Pansy, or, if you were not good at remembering names, "That little blonde who had on the blue dress. . . . She sat over there." Otherwise, you simply got a girl.

Martin stood on the sidewalk at the side of Sam Cohen's clothing store. It was a Saturday night, March, 1906. He had an appointment, and he had chosen Sam Cohen's because, directly back of Sam's, began the Acre. It began with a fat brunette who sat in the window of her establishment, calling to male passers-by, "Come here a minute, sweetheart." If the male was palpably young she substituted "Kid." Her establishment consisted of a box-like dwelling not much larger than the cubby hole built for John Jayne Scott, and she wore a red wrapper,

which billowed as she rocked. In her hair was a pink artificial rose.

Martin paced up and down the sidewalk. . . . Mr. Sterrett was late. They were to start at ten, and it was now ten after. "Twelve after," he corrected. "That's precision for you. . . ." He stood watching the minute hand of the union station clock, two blocks away. It crept, and the dial was golden. It reminded him, the creeping hand, of the morning of his return from college, thirteen months ago. . . . He would go over those thirteen months now. . . . Madeline, Vada. . . . Jim and his affidavit, which the Star would not publish. . . . Sterrett. . . . He laughed. "To hell with it. Nothing will stand up." Yes, Vada would . . . and booze. . . . "I wouldn't be doing this if it weren't for booze. . . . And yet I was sober when I said I would. . . . " He stood by Lemp's desk now. Lemp was talking, opening and closing his desk shears and watching the blades as if that were important.

"Pull up a chair, Lavery," said Lemp. "Sit down, Mr. Sterrett. This won't take long, provided Lavery's willing." He snickered. "And I guess he won't object; he likes to crusade. . ." He looked at Martin. "How would you like to take Mr. Sterrett slumming? He wants somebody who knows the ropes to take him through the Acre Saturday night. We'll print a piece about it next Sunday, week. The idea would be for you to help Mr. Sterrett get the copy in shape."

Martin thought. "Why . . . you ——" His mind stopped. For this man there was no word. . . "Why, you, I wouldn't take you anywhere. . . . Go gather your own filth. . . ." He would though. . . . He'd go. . . .

He'd take him through. And he'd help him with the story. This way. Sterrett could write his version, and Martin would write his.

"Why, I guess so, Mr. Lemp. If it's an assignment, surely I'll go. . . ." He looked at Mr. Sterrett. He had on a frock coat, and the same kind of wing collar he had worn at the picnic, exposing all of his Adam's apple. Mr. Sterrett extended his arm suddenly and, grasping Martin's hand, drew him toward him. "Thank you, boy," he said.

Hatless, Martin ascended the stairs to the city room and talked to Shirley about it. "Would you do it?" he asked.

"Why not?" said Shirley. "They do it in cities. Some preacher's always going through the New York Tenderloin. Same thing in Philadelphia, down on Vine and Race Streets. You're always yelping for color stuff." He grinned. "Star reporter, double emphasis on the star, takes W. T. Sterrett on tour of underworld. Appalling conditions revealed in city's red-light district. See next Sunday's Star for details."

"The hell you'd go," said Martin. "And I won't either. It's off: I'll tell Lemp."

"Don't be crazy." Shirley stood up. "Where's your sense of humor? Listen here. You'll have more fun than a barrel of monkeys. Take him to Pearl's. Get him stewed. Get him . . ."

Martin laughed unpleasantly. "Fat chance. I wish I could. Look here, if I go, are you going to let me write it, or am I going to come back and turn in one of those denatured things?"

Shirley blew his cigar smoke upward. He repeated

the operation without the smoke, blowing into his nostrils. . . . "Is that still eating on you? Well, for God's sake, can it. You're not Zola."

From where he stood Martin could look in the window of the girl's back of Cohen's. She was rocking, touching her hair with her fingers, humming a tune. In front of her doorstep the cement sidewalk ceased abruptly and became cinders. All through the Acre the sidewalks were cinders. You stepped from cinder walks into saloons, from cinder walks into the Standard Theatre, better known as the Honky-Tonk; from cinder walks you entered Pearl Beebe's and Ruby Slater's and Dolly Love's. . . . Once they had been residences. Once Grove Street had been all residences. . . . All bawdy houses now. "Like inflammation spreading," thought Martin. "A red spot first at which the neighbors gazed, saying, 'That looks funny. It hurts when you press it.' The whole district now, Grove for eight blocks, Cleveland, bisecting Grove at right angles, and alleys, down near the station." . . . Women. . . . Women. Along the alleys some of them charged only fifty cents. . . . They called persistently to passers-by. Later, if the man positively would not stop, they cursed him. . . .

The girl with the rose in her hair was motioning to him. She had stopped her rocking and was half leaning out of the window, her fat arms on the sill. Martin shook his head, saying out loud, although the girl could not hear the words, "No thank you. . . . I'm waiting for a friend." She began rocking again, but she had ceased humming.

Mr. Sterrett had on a light overcoat and a slouch hat.

He had on a different sort of a collar. Martin recognized him thirty feet away and began walking toward him.

"Am I late?" said Sterrett. "I hope not very."
He laughed rather foolishly and licked his lips. "You-know I forgot to bring any money and I had to go back."

"I've got a little," said Martin. "We won't need much.
... A few beers...."

Their shoes crunched on the cinders. . . . "You and your friend, come here," said the girl in the box-house as they passed. "O kid, bring your partner here a minute. . . . Sweetheart." She whistled.

They stopped under an arc-light, two blocks further on, at the corner. Mr. Sterrett turned up his overcoat collar. . . . "I don't think it's a risk," he said, "do you? My coming down here?"

"You ought to know better than I do," said Martin. He would insult this hypocrite. . . . He'd say. . . . No. he'd wait.

"We're here now," he said bluntly. "Where do you want to go? Have you any preferences? What do you intend to show up?"

"Everything," said Mr. Sterrett. "I want to show the people of this town, in a carefully prepared article, just what actual conditions are. I want them to see this district as I shall see it, and then close it up, wipe it out. It's a canker. . . . The club women of the town are behind me."

"How would a two dollar house do?" said Martin. . . . He stepped back. "Can you wait till I get a drink?" He entered a saloon door almost directly beneath the arc-light. He had a whiskey, one and then another.

Martin pushed the bell four or five times at Dolly Love's

before there was any answer. It was about half-past ten. Through the glass panels of the door they could see into the hall dimly. Overhead was a gas jet, the flame turned high. Martin could see it, a steady fan, ragged and a little high on one side. Looking up he could see it this way. Viewed directly ahead you saw not the flame but the globe, which was red. . . . A red light diffused all the hall and came through, like watered claret, on the porch. . . . They could hear music, a piano playing. . . . Martin hummed. . . . "In the shade of the old apple tree. . . ." The tune switched suddenly. . . . "Dear old girl, the robin sings above you. . . . " Suddenly Martin's heart hurt him. . . . They used to sing that, he and Madeline, on the porch, beneath the honeysuckles. . . . He carried the tune, very low, and she sang alto. . . . "Dear old girl." . . . He had never liked the words. . . . They were not poetical. But he had sung them, throbbing, and as he sang they became poetical. . . . He would not hum them now.

A negress opened the door about six inches. "Good evening," said Martin, and he and Mr. Sterrett stepped into the hall and entered the parlor on the left. Mr. Sterrett sat on a plush chair and Martin on a small lounge. . . . The piano was in the other parlor, across the hall. It was going again now, and there was singing. . . . Loudly, a man's voice, "Good m-o-o-r—ning Carrie." "Drunk," thought Martin, "and she's in his lap. He's rocking right and left, singing, and they're right up by the piano. . . ." He could see them plainly. The girl sat across the man's lap at right angles. Both arms were about his neck. . . . The man's face

was flushed. He was about forty-five years old, and married. His beer glass, overturned, lay on the floor beside the chair. He had overturned it as he sat it down. Every now and then the girl would kiss him, and he would not respond with much warmth. . . . He wanted to sing. . . . He would kiss later. . . . The girl shifted her position, and her foot touched the glass on the floor. It rolled, not away, but as on an axis, anchored by its bellshaped mouth. . . . "I do this," thought Martin. "dream through what I actually see, seeing meantime what I dream. This room, with Sterrett in it, is a dream. The other is real. . . . This will be real when I leave and see it in my mind. . . . It is faint now, blurred. . . . Yet there sits Sterrett and here sit I. Martin Lavery and W. T. Sterrett in Dolly Love's two-dollar house. That's good. . . . He's got nerve at that, coming here. . . . "

"Good evening, gentlemen," said Dolly Love. . . . She stood in the parlor doorway smiling. She glanced from one to the other. If she recognized Mr. Sterrett she gave no sign of it. . . . "Just two of you?"

"Just us two little chickens," said Martin.

"Any of the girls you want to see particularly?"

Martin looked over at Mr. Sterrett. . . . Mr. Sterrett licked his lips. "Just two nice girls," said Martin. . . . "Any good two."

In his mind he followed Miss Dolly down the hall outside. She was no longer smiling. She was muttering, like a negress. "What she thinks of men," thought Martin. "I'll use that too, some day, what Dolly Love thinks of men. She runs this house, but she hates men. . . ." He laughed. "Possibly that's why she runs one. . . ." She was a perfect madam, blonde, heavy, blue-eyed. She

weighed perhaps a hundred and eighty-five pounds. . . . Martin thought, "She likes pets. . . . If she had a husband he would be a vaudeville actor, probably a cornet player, or he would have a concession at a summer amusement park. . . . And Dolly would have a pet monkey. They would take it with them travelling. . . . If not a monkey, then surely a parrot and canaries. . . ."

The girls came in; a brunette in yellow was in the lead, and she called out to Martin before she was well in the room. "Hello, Mr. Reporter. Inspected any kids lately?" As Martin gazed at her, she seemed to be swaying. . . . She was drunk.

Martin went white. "Hello, Miss Dalton," he said. "What are you doing here?"

"Sporting," said Miss Dalton. "It beats teaching school."

She sat down on the lounge beside him. "Buy a round of beer." . . . She looked over at Mr. Sterrett. . . . "Who's your friend?" She stood up.

Martin stood up. . . . He could not help it. Miss Dalton was still swaying. She would say now, her face white, "Why, you sweet-scented ———" And then she would try to scratch him. Martin looked at her, his mind spinning. . . . "Christ, let her alone! Nothing she will do will be fastidious. She will be conscious of nothing. . . . Let her do it."

He watched. Mr. Sterrett had risen too. His overcoat, lifted from his knees in both arms as he rose, trailed, the skirt of it, on the floor.

Miss Dalton did not raise her hands to her throat. She seemed to be plucking, with both hands, at the side of her dress. She said, "Why that's Mr. Sterrett. . . ." She began laughing. . . . She walked out of the room.

Something like a flashlight went off in Martin's brain as she re-entered. He would stop her, but God, it was superb. . . . Miss Dalton was laughing. She held it from her as a girl would carry a too-full milk pail, watching the threatening slosh of the contents. Miss Dalton held this that way: it was brimfull.

Martin shouted, "For God's sake, don't! Look out, Mr. Sterrett. Run. Get out of here!"

Mr. Sterrett ran. Miss Dalton hurled it toward him, not the contents, but the whole receptacle, and she missed. It struck the door jamb, crashing, spattering and she herself slipped, falling toward it, screaming; and toward her and under her as she lay the contents ran. . . .

They were at the door somehow and down the steps. They walked swiftly, Martin and Mr. Sterrett, Martin toward the *Star* Office.

H

On Sundays the *Star* issued a morning edition. . . . Lemp snickered. . . . "You're as white as a sheet. What's happened. . . . Where's Sterrett?"

Martin sank weakly down in a chair. He laughed weakly. He straightened up, catching his breath, as a child might after a hard cry.

"What's happened?" repeated Lemp.

Martin ran his hand over his forehead. "Nothing, nothing's happened. No, nothing." Lemp placed both his arms on his desk. His sleeves were rolled up. He

traced a vein in his bare arm with his eyes. "What's the matter then?"

Martin stood up. He could not tell this from a chair. "You remember that school teacher Sterrett had fired, Miss Dalton? Well, Sterrett met her in the Acre at Dolly Love's."

"My God," gasped Lemp. "That's horrible."

Martin whipped down his index finger, toward Lemp. "Horrible? It was wonderful. . . . Listen to this. . . ." He laughed. . . "Listen. . . . She emptied . . ." Again he laughed. "Yes, tried to. Threw it at him and missed. . . . And she didn't say one word."

"My God," said Lemp, whispering it. He laughed nervously.

"I suppose you'd like the story?" said Martin. "I think I could write a column, maybe more. . . ." His voice rose. "I'll let you write the head. You're good at that."

Lemp sprang out of his chair. "That'll do," he said. "What's the idea anyway?" He pushed off his eye shade, which fell to the floor with a clacky, tinny sound.

Martin looked down at it. His voice was placid. "Oh, I just thought I'd tell you. I knew you wouldn't want it. You never do. You wanted a dirty story, by Sterrett. . . . I wanted to give you truth, by God."

"You're acting funny, Lavery," said Lemp. "Just what's on your mind?" His mouth twitched. He stopped and picked up the eye shade.

"This," said Martin. "Squeezing all the guts out of everything and presenting what's left as truth. It's cheating, lying. It's the stuff you goddam cheaters thrive on."

Lemp stepped forward, his arm raised... "Cut that," he said. "What's the matter, you drunk? If you don't like the way this paper's run get the hell off it.

Do you hear that?"

"I wanted to beat you to that," said Martin. "I'm sorry. I wanted to pull a cheap line. You spoiled it. I wanted you to shout, 'You're fired,' and I wanted to laugh and say, 'Too late, I've resigned.' I should have phrased it better, but that was the way it would have gone."

Lemp swung his eye shade. "I meant that," he said. "So did I," said Martin. . . . He paused. "I hope you understand. You see some day I'm coming back here, or somewhere, and run a newspaper devoted to the exposure of such people. All of them. It may be that I'll discover that I'm one. Sometimes I think I am. . . . If I do, I'll run a double-leaded editorial. It will be headed 'A Confession,' and the opening sentence will begin . . . 'The owner of this paper regrets to announce that he, too, is a fraud and will therefore cease the publication of this journal as futile in its special field. . . .' Do you understand that, Mr. Lemp . .?"

Lemp's mouth was open. . . . This man was crazy.

He was wild, drunk, and he was depraved. . . .

"I'll print lots of little stories," said Martin, "like this: I'll put green grass in the back of all my sporting houses. I couldn't write that for you. . . ." He came a little closer to him. "I don't blame you, Mr. Lemp. Really I don't. It isn't your fault, nor the paper's. It's mine. But I love a line like that. To me it means more than all the facts in Christendom. . . . You want Sterrett's stuff. That's printable. It's evil, but it's printable. Why

God damn it, Mr. Lemp, it's filthy. Those women aren't evil. Don't you know that? They're tragic and sordid and, in a way, they're ridiculous, but they aren't evil. . . . They don't want to be what they are. . . They wanted to be something else, but somehow they got to Grove Street."

Lemp licked his lips. They were dry.

"And Bill Gleeson's hogs," continued Martin. "Do you know he has a hog farm straddling the river? I used to swim in the river as a kid. They can't now. There's a city ordinance against it. Bill Gleeson's hogs wallow in the river, but swimming is against the law. I'd like to write that, Mr. Lemp. . . . Two stories. One about swimming when I was a boy, and another about Alderman Gleeson's excellent hog farm. . . . I'd like to run them side by side. . . ."

He paused for breath. . . . "And the school board story, about whipping. . . ."

Lemp flushed. "I didn't scotch that. We'll do that some day. You know why that was stopped. It was right in the middle of the city campaign. It would have been pie for the opposition."

"Sure, I know it," said Martin. "And I know why Jim Sanderson's affidavit wasn't printed too. It was libelous. Ex-parte and libelous. It surely was. I know that too. It wasn't your fault. It was libelous. I'm not being sarcastic; it wasn't your fault. . . . But it gnaws my guts just the same. You see I am a little crazy. . . . It makes me mad the way they fine these Acre women every month. . . . Don't even pull 'em, just fine 'em and let 'em go on doing business, and Mr. Sterrett goes on doing business. That makes me awful mad. I figure

somehow that if I could have written the story of that girl's suicide as I saw her there on the grass, it would have done more good than all the vaporings of all the bastard hypocrites in town. I wonder if you see that?"

Lemp laughed. "Perhaps you had better move on, Lavery. It's possible that you're too big for Carrolton."

"Or too small," said Martin. . . . He thought. "If he had said 'small' I would have said 'big'."

"I am going," he said, looking up—"somewhere. . . . But I guess it'll be the same everywhere else. . . ."

"I guess it will," said Lemp. "You're funny, Lavery." Martin suddenly put out his hand. . . . "I'm sorry. If I insulted you, forgive me. . . ."

Lemp took the hand limply. . . . "If you'd cut out the booze, Lavery. . . ."

Martin shook his head. "Unt-uh. . . . It isn't booze . . . exactly. I'd do it all over again sometime. . . . I ought to be going. If it's all right I'll make this my last week."

Chapter IV

E would tell Shirley good-bye now. He would say, "Well, Lemp and I had that fight. . . . I'm going. He fired me. Or I quit. Either way you want it. Anyway, I'm leaving. I'm going to St. Louis or Chicago, perhaps New York. I'll show all of you. Yes, I will. I'll do what I please, drink what I please, think what I please, but I'll show you nevertheless." He was pleased. Other men failed because of eccentricities; he would succeed because of them. They tried to buck life and fell. He wouldn't fall. He would climb, and, by God, right on the things that tripped the others. . . . He laughed. "Christ, I don't want any rules. Let me alone. I don't want any average. I hate average things. I want my life to be a fever chart, way up now, and way down. No average, just peaks up and down. . . ." He laughed again. "That's like the farmer. They asked him what the average rainfall was and he replied, gravely, 'Well, it varies.' Of course, there has to be an average. . . . I can't escape it either. . . ." He was depressed; he was in the clutch of something. Life was pinching him, crushing him, there was no escape. . . .

He was leaving the *Star* building now, going down those iron stairs at the back. It would be the last time. He would come in Monday morning to see Shirley. He would be very sober or very drunk. He could escape that way, being drunk. He would get drunk now, and stay

drunk. It was cheating, but he would do it. It would rest him, tire him out and afterward give him terrific remorse, but just the same it would rest him. . . . He walked on swiftly, toward Main Street. The better class saloons closed at midnight and it was now nearly twenty minutes of. . . . He would begin at The Stag. Have one drink there, possibly two, and then would move on. Toward the lower end of town the saloons did not close at twelve. They were supposed to, but they did not. The doors were closed but you could buy anything you wanted in the back room. He would go to these. And when he was fairly good and drunk he would move on again.

He would go down in the Acre. Without Mr. Sterrett this time. . . . He laughed, and aloud. . . . He'd go back to the same house, to Dolly Love's. . . . He'd say, "Miss Dalton," although that was incongruous, calling her Miss, but anyway he'd say to her, "You're an artist. A great artist. That was art, what you did to Mr. Sterrett. All Sterretts should be treated that way. . . . I've felt exactly that way myself. Fact is I've wanted to do just that but didn't have the nerve. . . . You're lucky in your new profession because you can do it. . . ."

They would sit and drink. . . . He would find out all about her. . . . She would be shy at first, that is to say, she would be reluctant to talk about herself, and this was funny about these women; but when she saw he was sincere she would talk, and he would learn why she fell after losing her job and how it happened that she went to Dolly Love's place. . . . There would be a story in this, and in a way she was like him. . . . She had

wanted to revile Sterrett and she had. . . . "Maybe they have thrown her out," he thought. "It's quite possible. . . . She was drunk as hell when I was there. Dolly would not like that. And she wouldn't like what she did either. Dolly hates Sterrett, but that was a little rough, even for her place. I hope she too has not lost her job."

If she had he would find her and console her. . . . "No, I won't," he said. "And if I should find her I wouldn't be consoling her but myself. Really, I don't give a damn what happens to her. . . . Or do I? I can't answer. . . . She makes me laugh and she makes me cry. . . . All life does. Not all life, but those things that I see clearly, and when I see them clearly I will not strip them of the attributes which make them vital. . . . They live then. Reduced to formula they die, and I do not want them to die. Whether they are coarse or stark or bleeding, they stir me, and when they stir me I want to set them down. Some day I will. . . . " He was depressed. . . . "Not if I drink. And yet at this moment I am moving deliberately to get drunk. . . Clerks get drunk when they're worried, and weak men do, at the slightest excuse. . . And I do. God, it must be that I am weak, and yet I do not believe I am. . . . "

He began counting his money. He counted by feeling in his pocket. . . . They were silver dollars, and, with one hand, he could slip one beneath the other in rotation. There were twelve, twelve of his fifteen left, to-day being pay-day. "I need more than twelve," he thought. . . . "I must have liquor first, at least ten drinks. . . ."

He walked on. . . . Yes, for a really good time he should have more money. He would go to Pearl Beebe's. He would be crazy to go to Dolly Love's. She might be enraged at seeing him again. Her eyes would blaze and she would call him vile names and demand quivering why he had brought Sterrett to her place. . . .

In his mind he was in the Acre. . . . He stood on a box . . . and there was a gasoline torch over his head. . . . It flared and made a noise. . . . He was drunk and he swayed a little, but he managed to stay on the box. . . . In front of him, and to the side, were women, all bareheaded, all in their tragic negligées. . . . Some were very pale, although their cheeks were heavily rouged. . . . Their eyes showed it. . . . They were haunted eyes, many with deep circles beneath them.

Martin let his gaze sweep over the throng. . . . They had on high-heeled slippers, and they moved constantly on the cinders. . . . They were attentive but they kept moving. They kept fixing their wrappers, throwing a sleeve back, or pulling their skirts tighter around their hips, looking down sidewise as they did so. . . . "Women do that," thought Martin. "Even these do, standing there on the cinders, waiting to hear what I have to say. . . ."

He cleared his throat and raised his right arm. . . . "Ladies," he began. . . . His voice was clear notwithstanding he was drunk. . . "Ladies, I have come down here to-night to tell you a few facts. . . . I have come to champion you. . . . I almost added not to 'blame you,' but that has the same sound as Mark Antony's oration and I won't. . . . I have championed you. I have lost my job on your account. . . . I don't

know why I did it, and as I can't explain it I don't deserve any credit. . . . I am not looking for credit. . . . Or maybe I am. We'll discuss my motives later. The point is that you touch my heart, and I want to help you. It is possible that you can help me"

He let his arm fall at his side. He leaned forward, lowering his voice. . . . "Listen, ladies. . . . Yes, I will concede that there is a touch of irony in calling you ladies. . . . But Sterrett would call you 'women' and I won't use that—and I can't call you by your real name to your face. . . . And you're not courtesans because you aren't attractive enough. Comrades won't do, for we aren't comrades really: this is just a whim of mine, coming down here to talk. . . . I am intelligent and I am of good family and I see life. . . . That's why I've come. . . . I see you, ladies, as you do not even see yourselves. . . Yes, I do. . . .

"You didn't want to be what you are, now did you? Did you now . . ?" His voice shook. . . . "Of course you didn't! You wanted something else. I told Lemp that to-night. . . . He thinks I'm crazy, but I'm not. . . . Nobody wants to fall. . . . I told him that too. . . . Some of you wanted love. . . . I know that. Some of you wanted money and the happiness you thought it would bring. . . . Some of you wanted emotion and petting and children. . . ." He paused, laughing foolishly. "That was a trifle maudlin, girls. . . I know very little about the maternal instinct. . . I apologize. . . But God damn it, I know you wanted something like that—all of you. You can't shake my faith. . . ." He raised his clenched fist, gritting his teeth. "Don't laugh. . . . I'll make

you believe. . . ." He leaned far forward, shaking his fist. "I said, God damn you, don't laugh. . . . You've got to have those motives. If you haven't there's no God, and who wants to live in a world with no God?"

He stopped, swaying, looking from face to face, eagerly. . . . "Do you get that? It's truth. . . . All of you, yes, every one of you, half-wits and ex-servant girls, and fat stupid girls, who slipped at thirteen, all of you reached for something and fell. You reached for God and fell backward in the Acre. . . . That's a good line, girls. . . . Use it. Tell 'em that Martin Lavery gave it to you when he came down here one night drunk and made a crazy speech. It's a shocking line but it expresses just what I mean, and so I'll use it. I do things like that. I always shall. That's why I came here, I guess. You see I'm reaching, too. For God, maybe, I don't know. . . . It's funny, girls, but honestly I don't know. I hope it's God. . . ."

He looked all around him, smiling. . . . "You think I'm crazy. . . . I can tell it from your faces. You think I am a little loony and blind drunk. . . . Well, I'm not and don't you forget it. I stood up for you to-night because I was interested in a principle. . . I guess that's what it was. . . . I was delighted to see W. T. Sterrett reviled. . . . I brought him down here. My plan was to show him up later, to write a story. Not Sterrett's story, my story. Very carefully I was going to show that W. T. Sterrett wasn't mad at you but at God. Man desires woman. That is terrible. Sterrett desires woman. That is more than terrible. He will always desire woman and therefore he will always crusade. That's it, girls. That's his trouble. . . ."

He lurched forward, falling. He lay face downward, sobbing. The cinders hurt his face, and particularly one eye. He could not close the lid, and his eye-ball was pressing on tiny sharp particles, which cut. . . . Horses lay like that when thrown with a rope for branding or castration. They did not close the under eye but lay with the eye-ball pressed against the corral earth, only it was fine powdered manure, and sometimes their long lashes moving were like little brushes sweeping streets. And they blew from their nostrils spasmodically, groaning, their breath making tiny furrows in the dry manure, two furrows slanting away from each other.

Martin groaned. He could not blow the cinders that way. And it would be dangerous to move his eye-ball. It might ruin his sight. He rolled over on his back, quickly. Overhead were stars, bright ones. He lay staring up at them. His lips began moving. . . . "Stars of a summer night. . . . Hell, no, it's March. . . . " He laughed. . . . He could scarcely see the stars now; his eyes were full of tears. . . . He lay very still. . . . This was crazy and dangerous, lying in the Acre in the street. . . . They would rush at him in a moment. They would begin kicking him. They wouldn't understand either. . . . Dolly Love would be screaming. . . . She would kick violently, missing his head several times and almost falling, but finally she would kick him in the face. He was terrified. . . . He would spring up quickly and fight them off. Ladies, hell! They were a bunch of harlots.

He sprang to his feet. . . . "Stand back there, you strumpets! Keep back. I don't want to fight whores, but I'll have to if you start any monkey business. . . ."

He was trembling violently. . . . "Why, they're gone. . . . They won't hurt me. They did understand. . . ."

Tears were streaming down his face. . . . He stretched out his arms and threw back his head. . . . "Help me, God, and help them. Oh, God, above, give me strength."

Almost in front of The Stag Martin halted. His head was throbbing so that he was frightened. Something would break inside, in his brain. No, that was foolish. Fellows of twenty did not have strokes. . . . He was thinking, that was all. It wouldn't hurt him. He stood opening and closing his hands, looking at the palms. . . . "God! That was real. I was there. . . . Wowee! I could almost feel their kicks. . . ." He laughed. "I won't go to Dolly Love's. She might attack me at that. . . . I'll go to Pearl Beebe's. It'll cost ten dollars, but I'll go . . . I'm a coward though. I won't address the girls . . . I think I'd like to, but I won't. . . ."

He would have to have more money. He would pawn his tuxedo again. . . . No. He would need his tuxedo. He was out of a job and he had better keep it. He would be leaving town soon, and it would be desirable to have a tuxedo.

For probably half a minute he stood on the corner, thinking. . . . He could borrow some money. . . . Jim Sanderson would let him have it, Shirley would let him have it. . . . "No, I am afraid of them to-night. They would embarrass me, make me feel cheap. . . . They would say, 'What's eating you?' " He paused, terrifically depressed, "I am asking myself that."

He wavered. It was difficult to dismiss the tuxedo. . . .

He had pawned it once for Madeline, and it would be good contrast to pawn it now, for a debauch. . . .

Three or four men began coming out of The Stag. They were singing. Martin looked at them. "Cheerful drunks," he thought. "I won't go in there. . . ." He began walking. He would not borrow and he would not pawn his tuxedo. The pawn shops were closed. He would go way down on lower Main Street and buy a pint of whiskey. This would cost only seventy-five cents. . . . He would drink it and then wander around the Acre. He would have eleven dollars left.

He drank nearly a third of the pint at one draught. . . . It burned and, for a moment, gave him a retching feeling. He did not gag, but he would have done so at the slightest stimulus, and to overcome this Martin shook his head and said, "Ar-rh." He was two blocks below Sam Cohen's, passing along a row of small houses. . . . The girls were not as eager as they had been two hours before. . . . They rocked as placidly as nice women rocked while sewing, and some of them smiled at him without beckoning. . . . There was warmth in his stomach. He stopped near a sign-board and finished the bottle. He flung it from him, aiming at the space beneath the board. It missed, striking the board itself. It did not break, but fell among some tufts of grass with a slick, streaky sound.

He was comfortable now. . . . He stepped forward briskly, lifting himself on his toes. He had no body. . . . He was all mind and that was happy. . . . This was great. Why didn't he get drunk oftener? He would after this. The world was funnier than hell. . . . Pale ol' Lemp sittin' there at his desk. Sittin' there and thinkin'

he *knew* things when he didn't know a Goddam thing.
... And Shirley. He knew a few things but he was afraid. He held his job because he was afraid. ... Mrs. Wynne. Jee's Christ, who was she? She'd be sorry. ... Wait till he did what he was going to do. . . .

He was mumbling aloud now, spitting as he walked.
... It was fun spitting, seeing how far it would
go... He took his hat off, and swung it. By God,
he'd show 'em... Damn fools who didn't understand anything.

At Gus Dodson's saloon, a few doors from Pearl Beebe's, he bought another pint of whiskey, paying a dollar for it. He placed the money on the bar carefully and said with some effort, "Much obliged. I hope it's good stuff. . . ." He stowed the bottle in his hip pocket, started to roll a cigarette, spilled nearly half of his sack of tobacco, abandoned the attempt and, bracing himself against the bar rail, ordered a schooner of beer He was not so comfortable as he was a few minutes before. . . . He drank only half the beer . . .

Outside, an arc light interested him. He stood looking up, listening to its sputter. Bugs sailed about it, big moth millers whose wings he could see, and some hard brown bugs which appeared wingless. They made a flat brittle sound when they struck the glass. There were a lot of them on the ground beneath the light.

Martin drank from his second flask, standing directly beneath the light. He did not care who saw him; he hoped someone would see him. . . . He drank about a third of the flask, spilling some of it down his shirt front. He dropped the cork. Gravely he recovered it, first picking up one of the brown bugs, which he examined. The

feeling of discomfort was going. . . . He pushed his hat back on his head and moved on, missing his pocket twice in an attempt to thrust the flask in, dislodging the cork as he did so. He staggered a little. . . . Whiskey from the corkless bottle began spilling down the seat of his trousers. . . .

"I don' wan' nany more booze now," said Martin shudderingly, shaking his head. "I feel wunnerful." He put his hand to the wet back pocket, stopped, thrust the hand into it, beside the bottle.

"Ol' cork's gone," he said, holding the bottle to the light and shaking it. "Jee's, I don't care." He put the bottle back in his pocket and lurched forward, trying to hold his thumb over the mouth. . . .

Although Pearl Beebe's had a back yard and green grass, it had no front yard. The front steps were almost flush with the cinder sidewalk, and up these Martin went, stepping precisely. He smelled violently of whiskey and his eyes were glazed. . . . He jabbed the door bell with his thumb, holding it on the button continuously while he turned the door-knob violently. . . . The negress who opened the door hesitated as she looked him over. . . .

"Wha's the matter with you?" said Martin. He pushed past her. "I got money." His voice was thick. "Wha's the matter with you?" He walked down the hall, turned to the left at the sound of a piano and, holding to both sides of the door, stood gazing into the parlor. . . . They were dancing. . . . He tried to count the couples. . . .

A girl stopped dancing, leaving her partner in the

center of the floor, where he glowered.... She approached Martin.

"What's the matter, kid? You drunk?"

"No, I'm not drunk." Martin released his hold on the sides of the door and tried to stand very erect.

"No, I'm not drunk. . . . See here. Got almost half bottle whiskey left. . . ." He produced his bottle. . . . "See."

The girl laughed pleasantly. "You better go on home, kid. You're pie-eyed—Miss Pearl won't let you be entertained...."

She tried to take his arm. . . . "Lea' me 'lone," said Martin. "Wha's matter with you?" He laughed and swayed, leering at her. . . .

The girl looked at him queerly. She turned her head and called down the hall. . . .

"I got money," said Martin. "What's idea treatin' me this way? I got more'n ten dollars. . . . Look here." He produced his remaining dollars and some change, holding them out in front of him.

A silver dollar slipped from his fingers, struck metallically on the uncarpeted hall floor and rolled toward the back of the house.

"Pick up his money," said the girl quietly, addressing the negress.

She turned to Martin. . . "Put your money back. . . ." She began leading him toward the front door. . . .

Martin shook his arm free. "Lemme loose." He thrust his face close to hers. . . . "You didn't hear my speech to-night, did you? Goddam little chippy, whyn't you come

hear my speech? If you'd heard 'at speech you wudden be treatin' me this way. . . ."

He tried to take out his money again. . . . "Told you I had plenty money. You're a dirty little slut."

She struck him twice, very rapidly, first with her open palm, on the cheek, then with her clenched fist in the mouth. She screamed.

To Martin the lights seemed to flare up suddenly, then grow as suddenly dim. Someone was striking him on the back of the head and there were blows at the base of the spine. "Kicks," he thought. "A man."

They would kick him down the steps now . . . a final kick, and he would fall on the cinders. It seemed that he was very sober. He did not try to turn to see who was grasping him behind the neck and by the left arm, which hurt. . . . The door closed, Bang! He stood swaying on the steps. No one kicked him down. . . . This was strange. . . .

He stood teetering, left, right, backward and forward. Each time it seemed as though he would fall, but somehow he managed to balance. "Just like I did on 'at box," he thought. . . . He spat thickly. . . . That was crazy. There was no box.

He looked up. There were no stars, but there was a moon. Two moons. . . . He squinted at them. Closing one eye one moon remained. With both open there were two moons. . . . Vaguely he was pleased. . . . "So drunk see two moons," he said. "Never saw two before." He laughed foolishly. . . . "Thought that was just comic paper drunk story. But, by God, see two. . . ." He laughed. "No box to speak on, but

by God, they did throw me out, whores did, and here see two moons."

He ran his hand over his forehead. It was damp with cold sweat. Carefully he negotiated the steps. "I'm goin' be sick," he said. "Feel sick my stomach."

He fell sprawling before he could go ten steps. He got up, walked rapidly, half ran a few steps as though pushed by something, and fell again. "God, I'm drunk," he said. He lay still. . . . He must get up. . . . Lying drunk in the Acre on the cinders. . . . His fingers moved. He would touch them, the cinders, and then, even though they hurt his hands, he would raise himself. . . .

Slowly, and with great effort, he raised the upper part of his body, and opened his eyes. . . . He held this posture, head, chest and upper abdomen off the ground. . . . He could not get up. . . . He could see though. . . . There were still two moons. . . . He laughed. . . . He looked down at the backs of his braced hands. . . . "Cinders don't hurt," he said. . . . His mouth opened. There were no cinders. There was grass. He was in Pearl's back yard. . . . Gently he let his head down on his arm and slept.

* * *

The Chief glared at him. "Like a bull frog," thought Martin. "He tries to glare but he can't. A bull frog can't glare. . . ." Martin swayed crazily, falling against the station house desk, catching himself, swaying, keeping his feet although his brain was falling. . . . He looked at Jim. . . . "Bull frog, hell! Bull frogs leap from green pads and strike clear water noiselessly.

... They swim gracefully, like girls, moving their legs more than they should; scissors of flesh, opening and closing without the snip. . . ."

He steadied himself and spoke out loud. "Who said you were a bull frog? You're not. You thwop when you hit the water. You make a noise with your blowsy women. Who are you, to regulate my morals, to tell me what I shall do. . . . Whad you bring me in for?"

He lurched, grabbing for the desk edge, which he missed. He fell on the cement floor, half sitting. . . . "Chief of Police, eh?" He fell back, laughing hysterically. . . .

"Get him out of here, Denny," said Jim. "He's crazy drunk. Take him home. . . . "

Martin got up. He pushed first with his hands. He sat; he stood on his feet, weaving. . . .

"Ha! Take me home, will you? What's that for? I'm having fun here." He swayed toward Jim, pointing his finger.

"While we're on the subject of bull frogs, Mr. Hutton, I want to discuss pixies. . . ."

Jim looked at Denny.

"Pixies," said Martin. "By God, you think they're cute. Well, they aren't. They pinch, the little bastards, and they pick their noses. . . . To hell with pixies, say I." He sat down again, laughing. . . . He rolled. . . .

He sat up, holding himself from the floor with one arm. . . . "And that isn't all, Chief Hutton. . . . They laugh at smells. . . . Yes, they do. And you do, Mr. Hutton. . . . You think smells are funny. . . . Yes, you do. Who made them funny? Answer me that.

Who said so? Some Mr. Sterrett did. . . . He made it funny for birds to fly over table-cloths at picnics, and for little girls to wade. . . . He made it so funny that men weave stories about such things, pointless stories to bring in things we can't mention before women. . . . We can't mention them but we do. . . . We cheat. . . . We put them in silly stories. . . . That's nice, isn't it?". . . .

The room was murky now . . . lights dim. The desk was not a desk but something to which he held while the rest of the room revolved. . . . He could hear their voices. "Put him here. Let him sleep awhile. . . . Maybe you better send for Lyle and have him give him something. . . . He's wild drunk. . . . Damn fool kid. . . ." He could hear the Chief laughing, standing by the bench and laughing; but there was a strange note in his voice. . . . The bench was cool. He laid his cheek against it. Cool, but he hated to lie down. The cops all sat here. . . .

He sat up, half sat up. . . .

"Lie down," said Denny. "For God's sake, go to

sleep."

"Just one thing," said Martin. "Listen, Denny. God played a dirty trick on us. I'm mad at him, damn him. He did this. He endowed us with a passion for women. . . . And then he made it wrong. He mixed up that desire and filth. Yes, he did. . . . He made Adam and Eve passionate and then kicked them out of the Garden of Eden for yielding to that passion. . . . He said, 'By this act alone you survive, but it's nasty. . . . '"

Martin tried to stand up. Gently Denny pushed him

back on the bench. . . .

"Aw right, Denny," said Martin. . . . "I'll sleep. . . . Needn't push me. 'Course I'll sleep. . . . I wanna talk about this in the morning, though. I want to tell you why I got drunk."

Chapter V

ARTIN sat up on the bench. Daylight was breaking, daylight Sunday morning, grey light which filtered with difficulty through a small dirty window pane just above his head. Martin sat looking at it, the dirty window pane with the light trying to come through. "Double distilled," he thought, "only backward. The light is not dirty, but it looks so. And that window actually makes it dirty. In the woods, and along a stream it would be pretty, this early morning light, only pretty is a weak word, but here it is not pretty but like water in a glass that has contained milk. . . ." Within him he tried to laugh. . . . "Some families do that. Pour water in the milk glass. They say, 'Oh never mind a clean glass. This will do.' . . ."

He faced about from the window and sat looking around the room. The cement floor was dirty. . . . Chairs were misplaced. In two of them there were newspapers, ironed flat by policemen's pants. . . . "And they are pants," thought Martin. "They call them that, the cops, and when they are called pants they are. . . ." He tilted his head, trying to read a newspaper headline upside down. Doing this gave him pain. He felt of his jaw; it was sore. . . . His arms were sore, his chest was sore, his back and legs. He felt of his mouth. It was sore. He touched his lips, gently, patting and pressing. They were very sore. He looked at his fingers. No blood, but the upper lip especially hurt. He felt of it

again, pressing as hard as he could stand it. It was badly swollen.

He ran his hands through his hair and down his neck, pressing. He pressed both sides of his temples, and rubbed his chin. . . . "God, but I was drunk," he said out loud. . . . He stood up and looked around for his hat. It was not on the bench or under it. He could not see it anywhere. . . . It was not on the desk by the docket. The docket was there, askew, open like a hotel register. . . . Martin went over and looked at it. He stood reading dully. "Trying to calm myself," he thought. "Pretending to be interested in this docket. I'm all shot to pieces. . . . I was crazy last night. . . . I am afraid to think what I did. What I did and what I thought I did. . . . That speech." He was suddenly enraged with himself. "Making that speech." He laughed. "That was sweet. Stood on a box and fell off. . . . Had to go and climb on a box. All the cheap street corner orators climb on boxes, and I did. . . . No originality there. . . . Had a gasoline torch. Borrowed that from the circus, I guess. . . . Those side-show men have them. I stole that... Stole my speech, too.... Tried to paraphrase Christ, or somebody. . . . "

He sat down on a chair on one of the newspapers. He felt weak. "Not a hang-over," he thought. "Just mooning. . . . I know exactly what happened to me. . . . They threw me out of Pearl Beebe's. . . . Girl hit me in the mouth. That's why my lip's swollen. Then somebody kicked me. . . . But they didn't throw me down the steps. I remember that. I walked off myself . . . and then I passed out. . . ."

There wasn't a soul in headquarters except himself.

... This was funny.... He looked up at the clock: quarter to seven.... Denny was asleep in the small room. He went off duty at seven.... "I want my hat," thought Martin.... "I'm not going to wait.... I want to get out of here... Go home...."

The door to the small room was half ajar. Martin pushed it wide open. Denny lay on a cot with his shoes off. His mouth was open. He was not snoring, but his breathing made a sticky sound in his throat.

Martin touched his shoulder, "Denny. . . . Where's my hat? I've got to be going."

Denny sat up and pivoting on his buttocks, swung his socked feet to the floor. He showed his teeth. . . . "Hello," rubbing his nose with the back of his hand. He laughed sleepily. . . . "Say, you raised hell last night, kid. . . ." He began putting on his shoes, lacing them. . . . He looked up. . . . "The Chief pretty near locked you up. . . . Ja know that?"

"Where's my hat?" said Martin.

Denny paused in his lacing. "I'm not trying to rub it in, Mart, but you ought to know. You raised hell around here. The Chief pretty near locked you up."

Martin sniffed. Denny's words shook him, but he sniffed. "What the hell do I care what the Chief nearly did? I nearly do a whole lot of things."

Denny stood up, hoisting and straightening his trousers. From a hook he took down his civilian coat. He was off to-day. He buttoned it rather carefully. "I got your hat," he said. "Let's go get a drink. . . ." He went through the door. "Your hat's out here, in my drawer. . . . Come here a minute, I want to show you something. . . ."

Martin followed him. "Look at this," said Denny. He flung open the police docket to a clean page, near the middle.

"At what?" said Martin. . . . He thought an instant. ... Opening the docket that way was like cutting a calendar months ahead, June to December.

"At what you did," said Denny. . . . "Look here."

Martin looked. . . . "I didn't do that," he said, yet he knew he had. It was done the way he would have done it. Printed carefully, to begin with, then written, not printed, and not carefully at all. He had printed in the center of the clean page, in big letters, MARTIN. The rest was scrawled. He read the entry:

Martin Lavery, Disorderly Conduct, Rape.

"Remember doing that?" Denny laughed queerly.

"I don't think I do," said Martin slowly. "What time was it?"

"Oh, about two o'clock. . . . You did it, before I could stop you. Look at your hands. . . . "

Martin turned his palms upward. There was ink on

nearly all his fingers.

He tried to laugh. . . . "I guess I did, Denny. . . . What about it?"

"Well, it made the Chief sore as hell. You can't blame him. It was pretty raw."

"Did you say you had my hat?" said Martin.

From the desk behind the partition Denny produced the hat. Without a word he handed it to Martin. His manner said, "You sure ought to have sense this morning."

"Thank you," said Martin. He put it on. . . . "Why did you say 'raw,' Denny?" He drawled the word.

Denny shot him an odd look. "Why? Because it was—raw as hell. Made a monkey of things here. Sort of kidded the Chief and the law. You know that." He moved toward the station-house door. "Come on, let's go get that drink. I don't want to appear to be ridin' you, Martin, but it was taking advantage. You're a newspaper man, and drunk as you were you knew he wouldn't pinch you. It got the Chief's goat, and frankly I don't blame him. . . ."

Martin said nothing until they were on the gravel walk outside. . . . He stopped. . . . "I don't believe I want a drink."

"Come on," urged Denny. "That's just what you do need. You're not acting yourself now. A little drink'll do you good."

Martin caught step with him. "All right. . . ." They walked on in silence. . . . "It wasn't raw," said Martin. . . . "And I'm not a newspaper man any more, Denny. I've quit the *Star*. They fired me, last night. I had a run in with Lemp, the managing editor. . . ."

Denny kept on walking. . . . "Drunk?" "Had a few drinks, but I wasn't drunk."

"What was the trouble?"

Martin laughed. . . . "Search me. . . . I guess I'm sort of crazy. I blew in the office and told Lemp a few things. . . . I guess he thought it was raw. It sort of kidded him and the law. . . ." He walked on in silence. . . . "In a way it was like my writing in the docket. I don't know why I did it. . . . This where we're going?"

They were at the back door of Fritz Katzen's saloon. Denny always drank here, nearly always. They entered and sat down at a small round table in the back room. Martin felt in his pockets.

"I got your dough," said Denny. He handed Martin three silver dollars.

Martin ordered two whiskeys. They drank. Denny looked over his glass. He shook his head. "Say, you were a card last night." He sipped futilely, having emptied his glass at a gulp, pouring the contents well back in his throat as though he did not want to taste it.

"We'll have another, Fritz," said Martin.

Denny chuckled. . . . "You said some pretty lousy things to the old man. For a minute I thought he might hit you. Then he saw how drunk you were. I saw right away. Say you were ossified . . . and funny. . . . Say, you were a card."

"Was I?" said Martin. . . . He took part of his second drink. He felt better already. He was glad Denny had insisted on coming.

Denny drained his second glass... "Remember being brought in?"

Martin shook his head. "Nope. I remember going to sleep. I think it was back of Pearl Beebe's."

"It was Pearl who 'phoned," said Denny. "You flopped right in her back yard."

"Yes, on the grass," said Martin. "I remember all that..." He looked away, in a corner of the room, upward... "I wanted to say green grass," he thought... "It's funny, I won't say it, can't say it, even to him... I want to cry too, but I won't..." He gazed down at his drink, raised it, drank it. "Who toted me in?" he asked flippantly.

"Joe . . . in the wagon. . . ." Denny looked toward

the bar. "You cussed him, too, Mart. He hit you once. Had to. You clung to the seat inside the wagon just like a monkey. And you tried to kick him. . . . He didn't hit you very hard. . . . Let's have another drink. . . . Just his fist. And he'll apologize."

"Let's have another drink, Fritz," said Martin.... His eyes were on Denny.... He laughed.... "He needn't apologize.... Joe's all right. Nobody need apologize.... I'm not going to apologize...." His

voice rose a little, and quavered.

"You're all nervous," said Denny. "Nobody said you had to apologize. Everybody gets stewed now and then. I do, but it affects me differently."

"Sure," said Martin, lifting his glass and drinking.

"For example, you want real cream."

Denny checked his glass in mid-air. "What do you mean by that?"

"Nothing, Denny. I'm sorry I said it. Forgive me. I couldn't help but think of the Sunday morning you killed that restaurant man. They said that to you, too, 'Why you're all nervous. . . .' Do you remember that?"

"No, I don't," said Denny. "But I was nervous. . . . Why do you bring that up? Gettin' an edge on again?"

Martin tilted his chair back. "I said I was sorry. . . . You see the point is, I want real cream. It may be that I've got to kill somebody to get it. . . . Maybe myself. . . . And that makes me all nervous. . . ."

Denny stroked his chin with the back of his hand, upward. Martin could hear his fingers against the stubble. . . . "You oughtn't to drink," he said slowly. "Liquor affects you funny. . . . I'm not going to quarrel with you . . . but do you know what you said to the

Chief last night? You made some dirty crack about him and women. . . You called him a bull-frog. . . . You said something about pixies, whatever the hell they are. Do you remember any of that?"

"I don't believe I do," said Martin. "I don't think I ever discussed pixies with anybody. . . . I have some ideas about them, but I can't recall having aired them. . . ." He laughed. . . . "Was it funny?"

"Not so very," said Denny. "Nutty. . . . What is

a pixie?" He flung out the word moistly.

Martin smiled wanly. . . . "Just a prejudice of mine, Denny. . . . It's possible that they're as nice as elves. But I picture them as messing up the woodland. . . . They pinch and do dirty little tricks. They spoil the springs and the swimming holes. And when nymphs bathe they either hide and spy on them, jumping up and down, pointing, or else they rush in on them screaming. . ." He raised his empty glass. . . . "But I may be all wrong. . . . I may be all wrong about everything. . . ." He stood up, pushing back his chair noisily. . . . "Let's call it a day. . . . And don't be sore, Denny. . . ." He extended his hand.

"You need sleep," said Denny, grasping his hand. "I'm not sore. You're edged again. . . . It affects me different, that's all. Up to a certain point liquor makes me more sensible. Then I simply get sleepy."

He followed Martin to the door. . . . "So long."

"So long," said Martin. . . . He took a full breath of the morning air. . . . The sun was up now. . . . "Great day, Denny. . . . So long."

"Hit the hay," Denny called after him. . . . "Oh,

Martin. . . ."

Martin stopped and half turned. . . . Denny moved a few steps away from the saloon door. He laughed strangely. . . . "Listen." He laughed again. "Jew know you cussed God last night? . . . You did. I'm just a cop, but I hated to hear it. . . . You were out of your head, weren't you . . . ?"

"Cussed God? . . ." Martin used Denny's words and tone exactly. He looked toward Denny but not at him. He looked beyond, and through; he laughed.

"Since you ask, no, I wasn't out of my head. . . . I meant it . . . I guess. . . . I'll cuss him again if I want to. . . . I'll do it now, while we're on the subject. To hell with Him. . . ."

"My God," said Denny.

Martin went a little white. . . . "Look here," he said. "You run your own soul and kill your own men. Let me alone. Even you are trying to tell me things. . . . You've had three drinks now, and as you say drinks make you sensible, listen to this: What I want to say to God I'll say. . . ." He paused, trembling, and a smile touched his lips. . . . "You see, Denny, I've got a kick coming against Him and you haven't. . . . He made you sensible and He made me a maudlin fool."

II

Martin used his book of street car tickets. . . . He would go home now, to Aunt Feddy's. Sneak in and clean up. . . . No, he'd walk right in, wouldn't try to hide. If she asked him where he'd been he'd tell her. He'd say, "Yes, I've been batting around the Acre. What

about it? . . ." He was pleased. He would tell the absolute truth. He had told it to Lemp, to Jim Hutton, to Denny, to the women in the Acre. Hereafter he'd tell it to everybody. He would hide nothing. Others might hide things, think them, but hide them and feel smug in the hiding. He was different. Concealing it didn't make it right. He had to think right. "I am more honest than they," he thought. "That's the whole trouble. They don't give a damn what they think, or do, as long as they aren't found out. . . . My fight is deeper. It involves motives. I want to want to do the right thing. . . ."

He was standing waiting for a street car, three or four blocks from police headquarters. The track curved here. It began curving a block away, and because of the curve you could always hear the cars coming. The wheels, taking the curve protestingly, made a dismal wailing sound. . . Most every town had a curve, or curves, like this, Martin reflected, and car wheels in many cities wailed. People waited, listening to the wailing, getting ready to step aboard, feeling for their nickles, adjusting packages under their arms, taking new holds on umbrellas. . . . If they had baskets, and women often had baskets, they looked down at them, sometimes lifting the newspaper which covered their contents, as if fearful that they might have jumped out. Then they lowered the paper and tucked in the corners carefully.

Martin listened for the wailing. . . . He fingered his street car book. It had only a few tickets left. . . . It was getting flat. . . . He would be turning it in tomorrow, handing it to Shirley, with the badge he had never worn, and explaining about his row with Lemp. . . . He rather dreaded it. . . . Shirley would smile

quizzically and say, "Well, you hung yourself. . . . There's nothing I can do as long as you act this way. . . ." And Martin would shrug his shoulders, answering, "I'm not blaming you . . . or Lemp. . . . Something drives me. . . . That's all. . . ." No, he would not say that last. . . . "Something driving him." Of course there was. Something was driving everybody. What right had he to think he had a copyright on it? Vassar girls, trying to write poetry, thought they had it, and pale, mooning poets did, fellows who carried limp copies of Shelley and spoke of their souls. . . . "I hate that type," thought Martin. . . . "I dread to class myself with them. . . . But I'm worse. . . . I've thrown up my job over nothing, got drunk over nothing and here I am dramatizing my arrival home to bait my old aunt. . . ."

He was depressed. . . . Still the car did not come. . . . He looked up and down the street. . . . The sun was well up now, and church-goers were appearing. . . . It was about the same sort of a Sunday morning as that first Sunday, the day he had dressed so carefully and called on Madeline. . . . He looked down at his clothes. . . . He was startled. He had on his black suit, and it looked terrible. Not only shiny but dirty. The coat was smeary and spotted. There were stains on the trousers. Martin began stroking the spots with his bare hands. "Tragic," he thought. "Old bums do this. I've seen them do it. They move out of parks or from saloon back rooms, stroking their old coats and looking down at their shoes. . . . Human tumble-bugs from under life's old boards. . . . I guess I am rather tragic this morning." He laughed. "And ridiculous. I look like hell. . . . Except for those drinks with Denny I would feel like hell."

He could hear the car coming now, and he began buttoning his coat. "Bums do this, too," he thought, "as if buttoning made any difference. . . . Well, I may be a bum.... Good practice.... I am compromising, though. There will be people in the car, clean and cool by contrast, and I am ashamed of the way I look. . . . I look as though I had been drunk. . . . If I had the guts I'm always saying I have, I'd swing aboard the car dirty as hell and smelling and say to them: 'Good morning, passengers. Some of you, I note, are bound for church. . . . You're going to pray to God. It may interest you to know that I just cussed Him in the back room of Fritz Katzen's saloon. . . . He annoys me. . . . You annoy me. I annoy myself. . . . Now hold on a minute. . . . Don't get excited. I pray, too, sometimes. . . . I prayed down in the Acre last night . . . Some of the girls and I had a sort of prayer meeting. . . . It was going great until I fell off that box. . . . "

His lips were moving as the car came to a stop. . . . The conductor nodded. . . . He knew Martin. . . . Martin swung himself aboard and stood on the back platform. . . . "Coward," he said to himself. . . . The conductor grinned as Martin tore out a ticket and handed it to him. . . . "Big night?"

"Oh, in a way," said Martin.

III

Aunt Feddy breakfasted late on Sundays. She liked to sit over her coffee. She called to him immediately he entered the front hall. Martin's heart began pounding.

wash up a bit. . . . Anyway change his collar, brush his hair and clean his nails. . . . He looked down at his hands. . . . They were scratched and very dirty. . . . There was that ink.

"That you, Martin?" Her voice came again, an impatient note in it.

"Yes, Aunt Feddy. . . ." His breath came fast. . . . He reached into his back trousers pocket for his hand-kerchief. It felt damp, the pocket. . . . He touched small gravelly substances. . . "Hell, that whiskey bottle," he murmured. . . . "Broken. . . ." He removed his hand and sniffed it. . . . Whiskey . . . strong and sourish. . . .

"Come in here a minute. . . Had your breakfast?"

"No, ma'am." He smiled despite himself. . . . "No, Aunt Feddy. I was going upstairs a minute to clean up."

"Come here. You can clean up later. . . ."

She looked up, biting her lower lip as he stood in the doorway. "Sit down."

Martin sat down. . . . She sniffed gently. . . . "Whiskey?"

"I guess it is. I spilled some."

"Inside or out?" Her lips curled. . . . "What do you want to lie for?"

"I'm not lying. . . . I did spill some . . . about a quart. . . ." He looked her in the eyes. . . . "Most of it inside . . . I guess."

"Where'd you stay all night?"

Martin lowered his eyes. . . . How could he tell her all? . . . He shifted uneasily in his chair. . . . "Sup-

pose I could have some coffee?" He reached for a nap-kin.

He could hear her sigh. . . . "You've already told me, Martin. . . Nobody acts the way you're acting when he's been decent. You've been with a woman. . . ."

He looked at her very evenly. . . . "I haven't been with a woman," he said. "If I had I'd tell you. . . ." He hitched his chair around so that he might face her more directly. "I have, lots of times, but last night they threw me out."

"They what?" Aunt Feddy leaned far forward, and her arm struck her coffee cup, which rattled in its saucer.

"Threw me out," repeated Martin. . . . "Gave me the bum's rush. . . . You asked, Aunt Feddy, and I'm telling you. . . I'm never going to lie about anything any more. I never did really. . . . But I've kept things back, dammed them up. . . . I'm through with that. . . ." He stood up, pacing up and down beside the table. "I've lost my job, Aunt Feddy. . . . They fired me. Not discharged, fired. I was a little drunk then, I guess. And I got a whole lot drunker. . . . I fell down a lot of times in the Acre. . . . Look at my clothes. . . ." He raised his arms. . . . "Look at me. . . ." He stopped, facing her. . . . "Do you know where I slept? Pearl Beebe's. . . . Not inside, but in her back yard. . . . There's grass there. . . . I slept on that." He turned away from her. "Not all night, Aunt Feddy. Just till about two o'clock. I finished in the police station. There's a nice bench there. . . ."

Aunt Feddy had closed her eyes. She seemed to be rocking back and forth in her chair. . . . "Oh my, oh

my," she said... Tears trickled from between her fingers, ran down her nose and splashed on her plate... "Anne's boy," she groaned. "Anne's little boy... Oh, Martin... Oh, Martin have pity on me!"

"You asked," said Martin huskily. . . . "You asked. And that's the truth. You've got it. . . ." He sat down, heavily. "Nearly all," he said faintly.

She looked up suddenly, drying her eyes impetuously, almost angrily, with her napkin. "Nearly all.... Don't tell me any more, please.... I've heard all I want to...."

She spoke calmly. . . . "What did they discharge you for?"

Martin looked out of the window.

"For general cussedness," he said presently, still looking out of the window. . . . "I baited Lemp, the managing editor . . . insulted him. . . . He baited me . . . but he didn't know it. You see I'm interested in truth, and he isn't. . . . It makes a big difference. . . ."

Aunt Feddy laughed a dry laugh. . . . "Truth? Trying to find it in a whiskey bottle and down in the Acre . . . ?" She began folding her napkin. . . . "Maybe Dick Burtis was looking for truth, too. He may have found it for all I know . . . but he killed his mother. . . . Thank God yours isn't alive."

Martin's jaw muscles tightened. "You don't mean that," he said slowly. . . . "You're maudlin. . . ." He tapped with his fingers on the table-cloth. His aunt watched him. His inky fingers shook.

"I'm sorry, Aunt Feddy. I know exactly how you feel. . . . Exactly. . . . " He stood up. . . . "I wish you knew exactly how I felt . . . exactly. You couldn't.

Nobody could. . . . I couldn't even write it . . . never. . . . That may be the trouble." He sank back in the chair and buried his face in his arms on the table.

She was patting his head, Aunt Feddy. "Don't," she said softly. "Don't, Martin, for your mother's sake."

She sat down beside him. . . . "Martha will bring your breakfast upstairs. . . . You better go lie down." She sat gazing at the back of his head, shaking hers.

Martin sat up precipitately, winking to squeeze out the tears. . . . He smiled. . . . "I'm ashamed, Aunt Feddy. . . . I do this sort of thing. . . . If I don't quit it I'll go under. . . ."

"Yes," said his aunt soberly, "you will. Go on upstairs now and try to get some sleep."

Chapter VI

ARTIN walked swiftly along Sumner Street in the darkness. Six blocks ahead—"five," he corrected, leaning to the right and counting the arc lights, lay the Wynnes'. He had done this many times before, walked swiftly along Sumner Street in the darkness, checking by the street lights his approach. . . . Six blocks from her, five, four, three. . . . He was on her block now, Madeline's, and in a moment she could hear his footfalls. . . . She had always laughed about it. . . "I can tell your walk. You strike your heels so hard. . . . Maybe it is your college shoes . . ." College shoes in those days had semi-military heels.

"Not to-night," thought Martin. "For one thing these heels are run down, for another she is not listening. . . . Or possibly she is. . . . I hope so. Her mother was right,

though. She didn't send for me. . . ."

He quickened his pace as he neared the house. It was a warm night. There was a moon, and stars. . . . In the parlor he could see a light. . . . "Mrs. Wynne rocking," thought Martin, "possibly half-reading a book. She has skipped whole pages. She knows the continuity of nothing, the relation of nothing, one thing to the other. She feels deeply only as concerns Madeline. . . . She must marry well. . . ." He laughed. "Lord, what does that mean, 'marry well'? . . . And she will live with them and criticize the husband's shirts. . . . No, not his

shirts. She won't give a damn about his shirts. . . . It will be his attitude toward Madeline, his looks, his words, everything. . . . In a way I'm lucky. . . ."

It was difficult to pass the house. . . . There was the iron picket fence. He had climbed this so many times, always thinking of the horse that had impaled himself. He would stop now, just a moment, and gaze at the porch and the honeysuckle vines. . . . This was all right. . . . He could not see through the vines. . . . It was not spying. . . . He stood opening and closing his hands. She was out there now . . . Madeline. She was sitting silently as she sat with him, only the man was not so silent. . . . He talked incessantly, of what he would do, of what he had done. . . . Of what he would do for her. . . .

He would call to her, approach the fence in the darkness and say, "Hello, Madeline. This is Martin, Martin Lavery. . . . I'm leaving town in a few days. . . . I wanted to say good-bye. . . . Good-bye. . . . "

He moved, in spite of himself, toward the fence. . . . He would not climb it, he would vault it . . . and fall . . . impaling himself. . . . He would say nothing then . . . twist a little possibly, letting the barb which was caught in his intestines work all the way through, and then he would say, faintly. . . . "Why hello, Madeline. This is Martin. . . . I just came to say good-bye. . . . and I guess I slipped. . . . You see I'm always slipping on something. . . ."

His hands touched the fence. . . . "Cold," he thought, "and not sharp . . . really. God, I'm a coward . . . and maudlin. . . . I'm afraid and I'm ashamed. . . . Torturing her that way. Leave her in peace. . . . If she

wanted you she would have cried out.... Let her go. . . . "

Tears streamed down his face. . . . "Oh, God, I loved her. . . . I do love her. . . . She gave me peace. . . . I need her, God. . . . Give her to me Give her to me to keep me strong and good. . . . God above, touch her heart now. Let her run to me, saying, 'Martin, Martin. It's you. I'm so glad you came. . . . I've waited. . . . I understand now. . . . I love you. I believe in you.'"

He stood sobbing, silently, wiping the tears from his cheeks with the backs of his hands. . . . He looked up. . . . Stars . . . bright stars . . . real stars He shook the tears from his eyes, and on his upper lip touched them with his tongue. "Salty," he said . . . "real tears"

Quickly he took his hands from the fence. "Fool! Cheap sentimentalist. . . ." He set his jaw. . . . "Let her go. . . . Real love doesn't whine. . . . Mush pot . . . babbler . . . drooler." He laughed, "God almighty make me hard!"

He moved softly now. . . . She should not hear his footsteps. . . . This was better . . . passing silently. She would never know. Huh! And she wouldn't wreck his life either. . . . He'd climb . . . to the stars. . . . He looked up. . . . Yes, to the stars. He was walking swiftly again now and, having passed her block, with less caution. . . To the stars. . . . They were low tonight. . . . Clustered grapes . . . massed diamonds in a woman's dinner ring. . . . He could almost touch them with a stick. . . . He kept looking up, almost striking as he walked the trees at the side-walk's edge. . . .

"With a stick. . . . That's like me, too. . . . You can't touch stars with sticks. It takes long ladders, very long ones, skilfully done and strong. . . . And I haven't the patience . . . or the skill. . . . Mechanics made ladders . . . fit rungs carefully, shaving off a little here and there, finally standing off and squinting at a fitted rung. . . . I don't like ladders . . . give me ropes. . . ." This was better. . . . He would climb on a rope . . . no, on a silken cord. . . . He was climbing now, hand over hand, surely, confidently. Slowly, because of its great length, the cord was getting in motion. It would swing more and more as he mounted. Zoom! Zoom! Through space. There was no sound, but he had to indicate the pendulum motion by something. Zoom. . . . Across space . . . past stars, planets. . . . He was holding by one hand, easily. He would pick a star in a moment. . . . Pick it and crush it in his hand as a school boy crushes a snowball, letting the sparks fall, watching them, fainter and fainter. . . . See! He could crush stars with one hand. . . . There was nothing in them. Crushed and they were empty. . . .

There was one very bright one . . . way off . . . blue white . . . at the very edge of space. . . . He would get that one. . . . He would pump on his cord, as a child in a swing, higher and higher, wider and wider. . . . He pumped effortlessly, twining one bare leg about the cord, thrusting the other out as a pitcher does, one arm free and straight out from his body, the other high above his head, holding to the cord. . . . He would not fall. . . .

Zoom! Through space. . . . He was getting nearer. He would strain a trifle, stiffening his body against the cord, throwing his head back . . . laughing. In a mo-

ment he would sweep through the milky way, scattering a myriad tiny stars. . . . He would laugh loudly then, shaking them off as a swimmer does, having dived, and he would blow them from his mouth. . . . Above, and through them, was the blue-white star. . . .

Nearer . . . nearer . . . nearer . . . It was cool to his body, the air of space. . . . He paused. . . . "Hell, there is no air. Too high. . . . Ether. . . . Operations and bandages with blood on them. . . ." He groaned. . . . He was no poet. . . . Keats could have done it, Shelley, Byron, Poe. . . . No, not Poe. . . . Poe had no ecstasy. No melancholy person would want to swing through space on a silken cord. . . . Poe would describe the cord, which would be of black or purple silk, and the black depths to which it swung. . . . Poe saw no stars. . . . He looked down always, and within. . . .

Martin laughed, looking up again... "Let me finish, God," he said. "Let me have that star..." He would finish... Details were not necessary.... Air, ether—what did they matter? He would not breathe.... That last sweep would be a delirium. He would not want to breathe.... He would reach... reach... scarcely holding to the cord...

The great cord seemed to balance quivering at the very apex of its swing . . . He had the star. . . . In his right hand he held it high. . . . He squeezed. . . . It did not break. He laughed. "And it does not burn."

"Peace," he said softly, "I can fall now and happily. . . ."

Martin threw back his head and laughed joyously. "Hi! Look out below."

II

Vada. . . . There was a light in her room too. She sat there nights, in the room at the end of the hall with her books, reading. There was a lamp on a stand, with a tasselled shade. She sat near this, almost under it, curled up in the big chair. . . . Martin could see her long before he got near the house. . . . There was no name for this room. . . . It had been built on, added, to the characterless house. . . . It was not like the house, nor a part of it. . . . It was like Vada. . . . And her books were like her. Not sets, shiny, unopened, ranged in neat rows behind glass, rather individual books, to be read and re-read, marked if you wanted to. . . "To be used," thought Martin. He laughed. . . . "As she should be used . . . deeply . . . marked if necessary. She is for the emotions also. She is Art."

He was depressed. This was maudlin, too, his coming to tell Vada good-bye. He had not played fair with her. . . . He had loved Madeline all along, yet he had called regularly on Vada, never planning, no . . . but hoping, yes, it was true, hoping that some day he might have her. . . .

He opened the gate, and in the darkness, felt for the latch, which he lifted and put back into place almost without sound. . . . He had been a hypocrite with Denny. He was a faker. . . "Pixies," he mocked. "Huh! Whimsical, eh? Æsthetic youth weaves woodland fantasies and puzzles stupid cop. . . . Hates badges. . . . Say! You want badges all over you. Your kind! And you pester God with your cheap

troubles. . . . Who's done anything to you? Why bother God?"

Moving up the walk toward the house he raised his clenched fist and shook it at heaven. . . . "All right, don't bother. You let me alone too. . . ." He laughed. . . . "Quarreling with God now. . . I accused Sterrett of that. . . I'm worse. . . . At least he's consistent. . . ." He stopped at the foot of the steps, once more looking up into the starry sky. . . . "All right, God . . . rebuke me then. . . . Show me the light. . . . Say something, do something. . . . Show me a miracle. . . . Say to me, 'Here is the truth. Here lies your destiny. . . . ""

Vada herself opened the door. . . . The thin colored woman took Sunday nights off. . . . She was all in white, her shirt-waist of China silk open at the throat. To Martin, who stood for an instant in the doorway looking at her, it seemed as if she were naked to the waist. . . Moonlight poured softly down on her, a silver stream, touching her hair, her face, with radiance. And between her breasts, in the little valley of her flesh, was shadow. . . .

"Why, Martin," she said. . . . "I didn't expect you to-night. . . . Come in."

"I just dropped in," he said. . . . "Vada. . . ." His hands reached for her. She made no sound, and no effort to resist him. . . . Her lips, half-opened as though to speak, remained half-open as his lips touched them; and her tight breasts, spreading and flattening as he held her to him, felt warm and seemed of themselves to move. . . . He pressed . . . blindly . . . roughly, striking her teeth with his . . . drinking her. Her whole body was limp yet responsive in its limpness. . . .

It was almost necessary to support her now, and as he raised his head and stood away from her, he braced her, holding one hand, placing one hand behind her back.
... Her face was dead white and her cheeks were wet with tears...

"Don't hate me," he said, breathing hard. . . . "For God's sake don't you hate me. . . ." He paused, dropping her hand, steadying her back as one balances a doll. "I couldn't help it, Vada . . . I couldn't. . . . I want you. . . . Can't I say that?" His voice rose. . . . "Can't I say that, either? I've wanted you since that first morning. . . . God, I don't know, maybe always. . . . Maybe since the Baptist picnic. . . ."

She smiled, touching the corners of her eyes with her handkerchief. . . . "I haven't said anything. . . . Maybe I've wanted you too. . . ." She looked up and then down, tucking her handkerchief in her bosom. "Can't I

say that either? Come on, let's go in here."

He was ashamed now, happy but ashamed... He sat down carefully, not too near her, in the chair that squeaked, studying her face under the lamplight.... How honest she was ... and frank...

"Don't look so serious," she said. . . . "I'm glad you did, Martin. . . . I wanted that kiss. . . ." She closed her eyes and half-turned her head. . . . Her voice was weary. "I want more . . . but I wonder. . . ." She looked up at him suddenly. . . . "What do you think?"

He would play square. . . . He sat forward a little in his chair, clasping his hands over his knee. . . . "I've never said I loved you, Vada. . . . That's why, until to-night, I've never tried . . . well, to press things. . . . And if I did love you truly I couldn't . . . press things.

... "He looked at her gravely... "Was it rotten for me to say that ... or not to say it?"

"Answer that yourself," she said. . . . "And why is to-night different?"

"It isn't," said Martin. "I am."

Vada tapped her chair arm thoughtfully, pecking at a tiny upstanding reed. . . . "I wish you did love me," she said slowly. "I could love you. . . . I do."

She smiled faintly and, taking her handkerchief from her bosom, touched her eves. . . .

"Life is funny," said Martin softly. . . .

"Yes," said Vada, "awfully."

"I'm leaving town," said Martin. . . . "I came to say good-bye. . . . I guess that made it different. . . ."

"I knew you'd go," she said simply. . . . "Not so soon, perhaps, but I felt you would never stay in Carrolton. Where are you going?"

"To a city . . . somewhere," said Martin vaguely. "New York perhaps. I don't know exactly . . . but I've quit the *Star*. . . ."

She knelt swiftly at his feet, one arm across his knees, one hand grasping the lapel of his coat. . . .

"Kiss me once more." She threw back her head and closed her eyes. . . . "And Martin, don't bump my teeth. . . . It's so ridiculous. . . ."

Chapter VII

HIRLEY tapped his teeth with a pencil. He liked to do this. Sometimes he played a tune, his cheeks a sounding board, his lips open as one trying to pronounce French vowels, or half closed, according to the pitch. He was tapping out Yankee Doodle now, tapping and looking sidewise at Martin, who stood in the cubbyhole doorway. He stopped and laid his pencil on the desk, moving it a little so that it paralleled a ruler. He swung round in his chair and spoke. "Why didn't you come up and see me when you got back Saturday night? You'd have still had your job if you had. . . ." He picked up the pencil again, tapping his desk this time, letting his hand slip down the shaft as he did so. "You boil too quickly, Martin." He looked at him with half-closed eyes. . . . "Just what is your trouble?"

Martin felt hot and uncomfortable. He would try to explain, though. He admired Shirley. He had so much horse sense. . . . He hesitated. "What do you think?"

"Want me to be frank?" Shirley's eyes flashed with mischief, then grew grave. . . .

"Go to it," said Martin. "I've always been frank with you."

"You're a Puritan," said Shirley sharply. "The realities of life terrify you. . . . You say you hate this man Sterrett. Why, Martin, you're ten times the nut he is. Sex gets his goat. Everything gets yours. You're running around in circles crying, 'Let me write it! My

emotions are stirred. Give me room and reams of copy paper. Isn't this perfectly awful!"

"You believe that?" Martin snorted. . . . He a

Puritan!

"Believe it: I know it. Why, Martin, Don Quixote was a piker compared to you."

Martin sat down, lighting a cigarette. "Tell me some more," he said.

"Well, you're a violent individualist." Shirley laughed. "It's hard to make those two gibe, violent individualism and puritanism. . . . Maybe you can do it, but I doubt it like hell. . . . And you're drinking too much. You can't beat booze, kid."

Martin drew down the corners of his mouth. "I didn't know we were going to have a temperance lecture. Who said I could beat booze? . . ." The phrase angered him. Ex-drunks, testifying in Bowery missions, talked that way. . . .

"Great guns, I couldn't help but notice it," said Shirley. "Ever since December. . . ." He paused. "Got pretty drunk Saturday night, didn't you? I've heard a few things."

"Middling," said Martin. "I'm still young. I'll do better later."

Shirley pursed his lips. "That was like a sub-freshman. Why in hell are you so stubborn? I'm older than you, Martin, and when you said to be frank I thought you meant it."

Martin blew out his breath until his lips vibrated noisily. "Oh, I resent it because you're not telling me anything new," he said wearily. "Nobody ever does." . . .

Shirley laughed drily. "That's another one of your troubles. You know, I'm sorry for you. You want to be Rabelaisian and you want to be pure, whatever that means; and you want to be wild and untamed, whatever that means, and you want to drink as much as you please and tell the world to go to hell; and yet, and I feel sure of this, you want to amount to something. . . . Well, you won't. You can't do it. Nobody can."

"Oh, I might," said Martin. "Maybe my system's new."

"As the pyramids," said Shirley. "You may think it is. . . . Wait till you strike bottom." He leaned back, fingering his bow tie. . . . "What are you going to do?" "Blow," said Martin.

Shirley picked up a letter on his desk and unfolded it. "How'd you like to work in Stantonville—The Gazette? They wrote Lemp, asking him if he knew of a good reporter." He smiled. "I'll recommend you as a good reporter." He studied the letter, reading out loud. . . . "Don't send us any fly-by-nights or booze artists. What we want is a steady worker who can stand the gaff. Ours is a morning paper."

Martin took the letter from him. "Gaff." What the hell did they know about gaff! "Booze artist." He could see the man who wrote that letter.

He scratched his chin. "Stantonville's a smaller town than this."

"A little," said Shirley. "Do as you please. . . . It'll be an experience." He looked down at his finger nails. "You like experience."

"All right, tell 'em I'll come, and thank you," said Martin. He stood up, his eyes wandering around the city room. He hated to go. He thought, "We're all like this. We kick the wood-shed door when it won't close, and mutter over bureau drawers that stick, saying 'Damn this thing'; and then when we leave them we are sorry. We love them."

He looked at Shirley. "Sure, I'll go. Just lie a little, if you will. Tell 'em I'm not a booze artist and that you think I can stand the gaff."

Shirley swung out of his chair and grasped his hand. "Can the drama," he said. . . "Do you mind if I get real personal?". . . . He did not wait for Martin's reply. . . . "You ought to get married. A good woman would do you a lot of good."

Martin put on his hat. "But what would I do to the good woman?" He moved toward the stairs.

Shirley snorted. "For God's sake, quit it. I haven't noticed anything so awful about you. You're the superadolescent kid, that's all, and you want to get over it before you hit New York."

"What!" Martin halted at the head of the stairs.

"Too long to repeat," said Shirley. "Good luck." He extended his hand again. "I'll wire these Gazette people. . . ." He chuckled. . . "Collect. They say they'll send transportation. . . . Say Martin . . ." He leaned over the railing—"Lemp would take you back. I can fix it, I think, if you'll keep your shirt on."

Martin shook his head and waved his hands in front of his face. "Much obliged."

He was depressed, and puzzled. He a Puritan!
But anyway Shirley had spoken of New York. . . .
That was good.

Chapter VIII

It was wistful, leaving Carrolton this way, everything tragedy. Martin stood beside his trunk in his room at Aunt Feddy's and thought about it. He was packing. It was a small trunk, but his possessions did not fill it, and a sofa pillow was necessary to keep things from jouncing. His sister had made the pillow and sent it to him at college. It had crossed pipes on it. Underneath the pipes was a tobacco pouch, half open; and beneath the pipes, right and left, were playing cards, two poker hands. Embroidered in a semi-circle above were the words College Days.

Martin wanted to cry the day he got that pillow. His sister had put in a great deal of time on it. He could see her embroidering, humming softly as she worked. She did not believe in smoking or poker playing, but she would do the pillow for him. It suggested fast living, but Martin would understand. It was symbolical; didn't mean that he was to cut up.

He felt like crying as he packed the pillow now. He actually needed it to fill up. He sat down on the bed looking at the small trunk, the lid raised. He had a white sweater with a v-neck. You wore this over your shirt instead of a vest. It was a Spalding sweater, with heavy ribbing, almost cord-like. Martin had folded it into a sort of a lump and tucked it in the trunk tray beside the pillow. There wasn't much else to put in. What he

really needed he would put in his suit case: the one military brush, tooth brush, his shaving things, his best shirts, those which did not have holes drilled near the neck by collar points; pajamas, underwear, neckties, a small picture of his mother. This was on the bureau in a leather frame.

He got the picture and sat down on the bed again, holding it in his hand. He had cut the picture down from a group, making a somewhat ragged oval, and behind it he had placed card-board, which did not fit snugly. If the frame were jarred the picture would slip to one side. As he sat on the bed he moved it with his finger, centering the face. His mother. . . . She had blue eyes. She was not pretty; she was beautiful. Her blue eyes were serene and yet questioning. On her lips was the faintest suggestion of a smile. She was smiling at the world, tolerantly and with understanding. To her, as to him, life was humorous, and, as to him also, tragic. So she smiled.

Martin covered the picture with his hand and without looking at it any more thrust it in his suit case under some neckties. . . His mother. He would like to talk to her now. He could tell her everything. . . . Or could he? God no. She would be horrified. Or would she? What was there to be horrified about? He stood up, closing the trunk lid suddenly. He did this with his foot, touching the lid, watching it teeter an instant and then fall with a smack and a suck of air. . . . His mother. Why should he drag her in this, his muddled life. His sweet mother. She had been dead nearly seven years . . . Probably dust now. He stood at the window, looking out. Dust . . . no. There would be

bones, very small bones. She had such small wrists. There would be her small bones, arms crossed, the fingers a little bent; and the leg bones, larger and not parallel. Human leg bones in graves were not parallel. They slanted, outward from the pelvis. . . . Men who perished in deserts were found that way.

Martin opened and closed his eyes several times. . . . She had been dead seven years. But she lived. Not as the picture showed her; that was only a year or so before her death. She lived rather as he had known her from three to ten. . . . He paused, verifying this. . . . What was his first memory of her, and his last? His last was easy. She was dying then. Cancer. He did not know this at the time. They said stomach trouble. They told him cancer some years later. They almost whispered it. . . . "You know, Martin, your mother had cancer." It shocked him, not that she had cancer, but the way they told it. What if she did have cancer? The manner of their whispering was frightful. It was as though they were saying, "You're old enough to know now, Martin. You're illegitimate."

"Yes," said Martin. Aunt Ada was explaining it to him, but he was not with Aunt Ada. He was in the hospital room with his mother. He sat on a chair pulled close up to her bed. On the other side of the bed, standing, was Aunt Feddy. At the foot of the bed stood his father, sobbing. His mother stirred. . . . She could just stir, like a bird crushed or a small bird in a nest, moving for the first time after leaving the egg. Only a thread of life. . . . She stirred, opening her eyes. Faintly she moved her hand, reaching toward him, groping. . . . There was the smell of alcohol. They had been spong-

ing her in this, cooling her thin fevered body before she died. Faintly she smiled. Her blue eyes were clear. Martin took her hand, patting it. He did not cry. His mother was dying, but he did not cry. He smiled down at her, ever so gently squeezing her hand. "Yes, Mother. . . ." He waited. Her eyes half-closed. . . . She seemed to return the pressure of his hand. . . . Her lips moved. . . . "God keep my boy sweet and pure. . . ." Her eyelids fluttered and touched her cheeks, resting. . . . She was speaking again, eyes closed. . . . She seemed to be addressing his father. "After life's fitful fever she sleeps well." Faintly the words came and ceased. She was dead.

Martin swung about from the window. "After life's fitful fever," he said softly. . . . She knew! He approached his trunk, locking it noisily, snapping the clasps. He smiled. "I wonder if Mother quoted right? I have never looked that up."

He stood listening a moment. Aunt Feddy was rocking downstairs, waiting to tell him good-bye. He could hear the thump of the rockers, then silence. She had stopped, thinking . . . and she was pushing the chair back. It crawled a little as she rocked . . . He was leaving at nine to-night; and Aunt Feddy was giving him a check for twenty-five dollars . . . And his father was in town, on a hurried trip from New York. He would give him something too.

The train would not go for nearly fifteen minutes but Martin had boarded it ahead of time rather than stand and talk to his father. It was difficult to talk to his father. And so he had left him, squeezing his hand hard in both of his, saying, "Good-bye, Dad. Don't worry about me. . . ." He wanted terribly to say more, but it was impossible. His father had given him a five dollar bill, removing it carefully from a purse. The bill had been folded a long time, and it was creased tightly.

"Thank you, Dad," said Martin, thrusting it rather roughly into his pocket. He wanted to cry. But the way he had thrust the bill into his pocket gave no such impression whatsoever. His father looked at him, fingering his watch chain. "Try to save a little, Martin," he said. . . . "I don't mean that five. But always. It's important to save. . . . I'm afraid you're inclined to be reckless, like your mother. . . ."

Martin wanted to say. "Save? For what?" He grinned. . . . "Don't worry," he repeated. . . . "I'll take good care of myself. . . . Tell Sis good-bye for me again. . . ." He stooped, picking up his suit case. . . . "I guess I ought to be getting on the train. . . ."

He sat in the day coach, close to the window, looking out on the stretches of brick between tracks. They were chopping ice somewhere for the coolers in the sleepers. He could hear the chopping. And they were putting water in the car tanks. He could not hear this, but at intervals he could see loops of black hose being dragged across the bricks. Every now and then the men dragging the hose would stop and look back as a woman does at the train of her gown, then, still like a woman, they would flirt the hose forward, sloshing water out of the nozzle.

The train began starting. Coupler noises, heavy and metallic, slight swaying of the bell rope, creaking of the mortised wood. They were under way . . . clack, clack, clacking through the yards. Green and red lights. A tower with men inside, in front of them many handles. Across the yards a string of freight cars moving, engineless, a man standing on the last car, swaying a little, describing with a lantern arcs right and left.

Martin left his seat and went to the rear of the car. He would look back from the platform at Carrolton. Possibly wave his hand, whispering softly, "Good-bye, old town. Good-bye, Mother. You understood. Sleep sweetly until I come, my mother. . . . Good-bye, Madeline. . . . Good-bye, Vada. . . ."

He paused at the water cooler. . . . His lips were trembling. He stopped, fumbling for the glass. He would not go out on the back platform. He drew water, pressing the small faucet handle until it hurt his palm. He took only a swallow and poured the remainder through the little drain, which sucked it noisily. . . . He would not go out on the platform. He would not be weak. Let them all go! He stood hesitant, looking at the car door. . . . He could not look back if he wanted to. His car was near the middle of the train. He laughed. . . . He would return some day, and not in a day coach. Madeline would be married. They would meet, and her eyes would show that she loved him. He would shake hands, not lingeringly, but swiftly, and in his eyes she would read nothing. He would not be married. He would never marry. He would have Vada. They would be happy, completely so, but in his heart he would always love Madeline, and purely,

He was calmer now, and as he sat down again he moved his suit case, laying it on its side and pushing it under the seat in front of him. It had touched his legs before. He would relax and be comfortable. There was nothing to be disturbed about. His mother, yes. But she had been gone since he was fourteen. He was nearly twenty-one now. . . . Not a thing to be disturbed about. He had health, intelligence, ambition . . . heart. Yes, heart. He would discipline himself and succeed. He was bound to succeed. . . . And there was Vada.

It was a vision, the certainty with which he saw himself having her. Madeline was gone. Her image he would tuck away, as the small picture of his mother. She would never change. She would always be seventeen, just as his mother would always be as she was to him as a child. Vada would change. From far off he would watch her changing, grow more and more womanly as he grew more masculine. And she would watch him-he would pray for this—so that when they were reunited there would be no surprise. It would all be so natural. They would live as man and wife, but there would be no shame. . . . He would write her regularly, keeping in touch with her until the opportunity to make her his mistress came. He would never write to Madeline. What was the use? It would be difficult enough writing to Vada. He detested men who wrote long intimate letters, or postal cards. . . . He would write her just a few words, in letters.

They would be humorous letters . . . just a phrase or so. . . . "Until the day. . . ." "Have you landed the library yet? Some day you shall have on the shelf a book of mine. . . ." He paused. That wasn't humorous. His book. He had no humor or he wouldn't be thinking so seriously of that book, at twenty. He

couldn't write a book. It would require too much sustained effort and planning. It would lack humor. It would be morbid, introspective, unprintable. He would have to wait years, and meantime, day by day, his enthusiasm would ebb. At thirty he would see nothing with the poignancy with which he saw things now. He would be a burnt-out disillusioned cynic then. . . . He was already . . . or was he?

He moved closer to the window, looking out. Darkness. Where there was timber greater darkness. Whoot! Whoot! Whoot-whoot! The engine, way up ahead. Bridges, culverts; strange, roary cavernous noises as they crossed. A curve. Lurching of the cars, the bell rope swaying violently now. A brief glimpse of one side of the engine, drive wheels working, seen only when he pressed his nose against the pane. Jets of steam, pinkred beneath as they ascended: sparks, scooting upward in showers, falling, some still burning, beside the track and in tree tops.

Martin felt very lonely. It would be good to be back in the sleeper. Nice people playing cards quietly on smooth mahogany tables. Porters patting pillows. The little bells and their black buttons. They rang faintly way down the corridor. . . . He was compromising. He would have to fight or become ordinary. He was leaving his background. He could meet no Madelines in Stantonville. He would have no social status. He sniffed to himself. . . . "Damn social status. Give me freedom and a wench."



Book III The Keen Desire



BOOK III

Chapter I

STANTONVILLE, if smaller, was much older than Carrolton and more Southern in atmosphere, tradition and location. Although the year was 1906, the natives spoke frequently and casually of Yankees, and on occasion argued violently that Jefferson Davis in his final flight was not disguised as a woman. It was the state capital and boasted of an insane asylum with two thousand six hundred inmates.

Two brothers, the Merediths, owned the *Gazette*. One was about forty, the other about thirty. The elder had an enclosed office by himself where he wrote editorials; the younger sat outside at an old roll-top desk and ran the news department. He handled, finally, all copy, local and telegraph, writing headlines with great rapidity. If a head balanced well he was pleased. The size of words, not their meaning, interested him.

As the *Gazette* was a morning paper, only the exchange editor was in when Martin, having walked up from the station, climbed the stairs to the editorial rooms. It was about ten o'clock in the morning.

The exchange editor sat at what appeared to be an old kitchen table, thrusting a pair of long shears, closed, beneath the wrappers on newspapers. As he unfolded

them he stacked them, compressing the growing pile. Papers kept tumbling off every time he did so.

Martin set down his suit case.

"I'm the new reporter," he said. "My name is Lavery. I just got in from Carrolton."

The man nodded. "Beggs'll be in about noon," he said after a moment. "He's the City Editor." He put his corncob pipe down. Having a flat bottom it stood up nicely, yet he regarded it intently as though it had performed something of a trick. "They're expecting you," he added.

"That's good," said Martin. There didn't seem to be much else to say.

"Guess I'll stroll around a little and come back. Can I leave my suit case?"

The man pointed under the table with his pipe stem, and moved his legs back.

"Thanks," said Martin. He turned the grip on its side and pushed it beneath the table. He still felt rather lonely. He was not Anne Lavery's son or Martin Searle's nephew. He was the new reporter from Carrolton. . . . The man had not even offered to shake hands. . . . Anyway they didn't know what a damn fool he was. He would impress them at the start that he was a humorist. . . .

"So long," he said. "See you later." He was a little sorry he had said this. It was fresh; it would annoy the old man. He laughed to himself going down the stairs. . . . "That's why I said it; he annoyed me."

Beggs was in when Martin returned. He sat in a small partitioned ante-room at a flat-topped desk, both elbows on it, a copy of the *Gazette* of that day spread out

before him. He was smoking a cigar, pausing now and again to inspect and repair the wet end of it by plastering down a bit of curling leaf.

"Mr. Beggs?"

"Mr. Lavery?" Beggs rose, the cigar still in his mouth. He appeared to be about twenty-five years old. He had black hair and red cheeks. The red was startlingly incongruous, for the rest of his face was almost white. Looking at him Martin expected to see the red vanish, leaving him all white. He had irregular teeth, very sharp and far apart. They looked almost as if they had been filed.

Martin disliked him at once. This was too bad. He wanted to work with somebody he liked. . . . Beggs would be cold and practical; he looked it. Possibly he had answered an advertisement: "Sober, reliable city editor wanted. Good salary to the right party, who is a hustler. . . ." The Merediths would word it something like that. The letter that had brought Martin would indicate as much.

"Make yourself at home," said Beggs, after they had shaken hands. "Be with you in a minute. It might be a good idea for you to look over to-day's paper . . . to see how we do things here." He half-tossed Martin a copy of the paper, and Martin sat down in a chair in the corner, removing some dusty folded newspapers to do so.

Two men came in, comprising, with Martin, as he was to learn, the reportorial staff. One was a young man, distinctive only in that he wore a mustard-brown suit with derby to match; but the other, although his clothes left no impression one way or the other, had sad grey blood-shot eyes that interested Martin at once. And the

muscles of his face seemed to be all broken down. His name was Nevins. As Martin learned later he had once been the Dramatic Critic on a Chicago paper. But for the *Gazette* he was doing the produce market, society, women's clubs, lodges, churches and general work.

Notwithstanding the broken down tissues of his face, Nevins shook hands vigorously and said, "Hello." His tired eyes said, "I bucked life once." He inspected Martin closely and sat down beside him while the young man in the brown suit was getting his assignments. "Give old Estes a kick in the pants for me," he said irrelevantly.

Martin laughed, although he did not know whom the man was talking about. "How's that?" he said after a moment.

"The Governor," said Nevins. "The sweetest scented old fraud in the Southwest." Fraud was not quite the word he used. "You're going to do the State House, aren't you?"

"Don't let him josh you, Mr. Lavery," said Beggs. "I'll explain to you about the Governor. He never sees newspaper men. That's the one office in the State House we skip. We had a fight with him and never patched it up. He's an old fool anyway. You've heard of him—Sam Estes?"

Martin nodded. He remembered some feature stories about Governor Estes printed in the *Star*. He was always having fist fights; he ate with his knife and campaigned in his shirt sleeves; and once, so the stories said, he made a great hit with his farmer host by rising in his chair and hurling his fork at a cackling hen perched on a rafter above the table.

"Just ignore Governor Estes," said Beggs, when he had

finished with Nevins' assignments. "I'll show you around now."

The State House was almost in the center of the town, only a few blocks from the *Gazette* building. It was very old; its walls, inside and out, were yellow and mouldy. They were stone, but age and weather had made them look porous; and from a distance, or viewed through half-closed eyes, the structure appeared to be adobe. Stoves heated it, big bellied stoves that were so seldom polished that they had a grey earthen look. They sat on pieces of ragged zinc.

Beggs did not talk much as they walked along, except to explain that Martin was to do the State House every day, together with police and undertakers, and when he was through with his run, general assignments. At night, after he had written his copy, he was to take the late watch at Police Headquarters. He was to report at one P. M. daily, and receive good-night at headquarters at two-thirty next morning, a trick of thirteen and a half hours. Every other Sunday he was to have off. His salary would be fifteen dollars a week.

Martin reached behind his neck and lifted the velvet collar of his paddock as they approached the State House steps. . . . He was getting the cub run—police, undertakers—the same old thing; but the town was new, and the State House, that was different. There was a thrill in beginning this new work. He would see things. . . . As always.

"The Governor's got a rather nice girl secretary," said Beggs as they ascended the steps. "She gives us stuff now and then. She's a pretty good sport. I'll introduce you."

They moved through the State Departments, all except the Governor's office: that was in a wing, above. . . . "Shake hands with Mr. Lavery," said Beggs to everybody they met. "He's come with us."

Martin gripped the hands extended to him with great vigor. "Glad to know you," he said in each case.

They stopped in the State Treasurer's office, which was on the main floor, nearly in the middle of the building. In the center of the room was a big stove, and, at one side of it, against the wall, several chairs.

Beggs sat down. "She usually hangs out here," he said.

"What?" said Martin.

Beggs called familiarly to a clerk who stood behind a wicket. "Where's Miss Evans?"

"'Round the buildin' somewhere," said the clerk. He looked up. "Want me to get her?"

"Never mind," said Beggs. "You'll meet her later," addressing Martin. "Come on; we'll go down to police."

They moved out on sort of a porch, nearly flush with the lawn. Extending from the floor to the ceiling were columns, which were peeling. Martin could not tell whether they were stone or composition. He looked up at them and then down the walk, a gravel walk which stretched for nearly fifty yards to the gate. The State House had a spacious lawn.

"Here she comes now," said Beggs. "That's Miss Evans."

A girl was coming up the walk. She had on a small, close-fitting red hat and a black and white checked skirt, fairly short.

She flashed a smile at Beggs as she came up the steps.

"Howdy," she said lightly. She smiled up at him again, showing her teeth, which had slightly rounded surfaces and were pretty.

"Like a dentrifice ad.," thought Martin, "and yet not too toothy." For the moment he did not see any other details of her, only the red hat and the checked skirt and the smile. . . Before Beggs could say anything Martin took off his hat. The girl looked at him. She started to smile and did not. That is, her lips closed again after opening ever so slightly. Her eyes continued to smile. Martin noticed that she had a short upper lip.

"I want to introduce Mr. Lavery," said Beggs. "He's come with the *Gazette* and he'll have this run."

The girl put out her hand. "I'm glad to meet you."

"Glad to meet you," said Martin. He made the you a little more emphatic than he intended.

Their eyes met. Hers were blue-grey and not very large.

"You'll find Miss Evans a pretty good friend at court," said Beggs.

She laughed. Martin could see her taking him in . . . coat . . . hat. He lowered his eyes, taking her in. She was slender. She had pretty legs. He could tell, from her feet and ankles.

"We do our best to please," said Miss Evans.

She looked at him again.

"Well," said Beggs. He knocked the ash off his cigar with his little finger and stepped down one step.

"Good-bye," said Martin.

"Glad to see you any time," said the girl. She flashed him another vivid smile.

"She's been with the Governor five years," said Beggs

as they moved away. "Not a bad looking girl. Pretty smart too. Nobody puts anything over on her." He laughed. "She's wise. She gets a hundred and a quarter a month."

"How old . . . would you guess?" asked Martin.

"Oh, I'd say twenty-four or five. That's my guess."

Martin was sorry. It seemed very old, twenty-five.

She wasn't bad looking at that. Her smile was quite wonderful. She squirted them. That sounded wet. . . .

The smiles weren't. . . . That was their brilliancy and their swiftness. . . "Not a half bad wench," he thought. The thought had come despite him. . . . Probably because she worked. She made more than he did . . . more than twice as much. . . . It made him feel small. . . . He wanted to ask Beggs where she lived, find out something about her family. But that would be all out of place. Anyway he would find out in a few days. . . . She came of ordinary people; he was sure of that.

They walked down Market Street, the main business thoroughfare, toward Police Headquarters. "You won't have to be introduced to the undertakers," Beggs said. "There're three of them. . . . Here's Headquarters. You'll want to meet the Chief. . . . I'll cover the State House, going back, and police too, to-day. You just take undertakers to get your hand in. . . ."

II

Martin had two deaths to write when he returned to the office about half past five. He wrote them carefully, on separate sheets, and fastened them together when he had finished by tearing and pinching the paper at the corner. He laid them on Beggs' desk.

"Come and meet Mr. Jim Meredith," said Beggs. "He's

the Managing Editor."

And Martin was introduced to the younger brother. He had on an old smoking jacket, out at both elbows. It was the color of a faded Yaeger blanket and there were scrolls of braid on the cuffs. Strangely, the braid seemed almost new. There were puffs under his eyes, and tiny criss-crosses of blue and purple veins on his nose and cheeks. "Booze," thought Martin, "and no exercise. He drinks, not as I do, to escape something, but regularly, as Denny does. . . . He probably has a pet blonde, who's fat. . . . He calls her Baby. I wonder if he wrote the letter specifying no booze fighters wanted?"

"Pull up a chair and sit down," Meredith said pleasantly. As Martin sat down he opened a drawer of his desk and scooped up some loose smoking tobacco, filling his pipe. Martin could see in the drawer. There was a pistol in it, a big old fashioned Colt, with a wooden handle. . . . Martin was pleased. A Southern editor with a six-shooter in his desk. Possibly, judging by Meredith's face, he had a jug in the other drawer. He rather hoped he had. . . . He would say so. And he would comment on the pistol.

"Getting started all right?" said Meredith puffing.

"Fine as silk," said Martin. Meredith had a soft, pleasing voice. "A sport," thought Martin. "I'll like him better than Beggs."

Meredith puffed a while. "I suppose Beggs has ex-

plained the situation at the State House to you. We don't eat at the same table with Estes. He's a woman-chasing old coot."

"There's a lot of them," said Martin. He liked this man.

"Where did you go to college?" he asked suddenly.

"Yale," said Meredith, taking his pipe out of his mouth swiftly. "How did you know I went to college?"

"You act educated," said Martin. . . . He bit his lip. That was fresh. He would get in wrong at the start; and he liked Meredith.

"You have a manner," he corrected, laughing. "I can see you are a gentleman."

"That's nice," said Meredith dryly. "You went to college, too. . . . Didn't you?"

"Yes," said Martin, "Cornell."

"Then what did you go into this damn business for? There's no money in the newspaper business. We inherited this paper: otherwise I wouldn't be in it."

"Because I like it," answered Martin decisively. He did not care as much for Meredith now. Men who were newspaper men should love it.

He cleared his throat. "Where's a good place to eat, Mr. Meredith?"

Meredith scratched the side of his face. "Good? Hell, I don't know a good place in town. I eat home. I'm married. There's the Commonwealth: that's the best hotel, and that's rotten. And there's a batch of restaurants. Beggs boards somewhere. Ask him. . . ." He called. . . . "Oh, Beggs. . . . Come here a minute."

It occurred to Martin that he hadn't any place to sleep either. . . .

Beggs came in. "Where do you eat?" demanded Meredith. Martin liked him again. . . .

"Out at Mrs. Edgell's," said Beggs.

"Can't Lavery eat there?"

"I reckon he can." Beggs' tone said, "I'm not stopping him." It was apparent that Meredith riled him. . . . Hired him as "sober and a hustler," but looked down on him as a plantation owner on an overseer.

"Fix him up," said Meredith.

"Yes, sir," said Beggs.

Meredith got out of his chair, dusting tobacco off his vest and trousers. He pointed to his open drawer. "See that gun?" Martin took a step nearer, looking, as though he had not noticed the pistol before.

"That's for our Governor," said Meredith.

Martin laughed. "He probably says that to every new man," he thought.

He walked back with Beggs to his ante-room. "I'll carry you along with me to supper," said Beggs. His manner was friendly. He hated Meredith; he would be chummy now with Martin.

"Is he serious . . . about the Governor?" asked Martin.

Beggs snorted. But when he answered he lowered his voice. "Hell, no. He wouldn't shoot anybody. He talks big."

"What is it, politics?"

Beggs looked sidewise at him. "I'll tell you later. On our way to supper. We might as well go now."

"Politics, no," he said as they walked away from the office. . . . "I might as well tell you: you'll hear . . . anyway. . . . It's that girl."

Martin thrust out his tongue. "That secretary?" "Sure," said Beggs. "Edna Evans." He laughed.

"Huh," said Martin. "Thought Meredith was married."

"He is, but that don't keep him from being sporty."

"Is he a success?" asked Martin.

"If you mean with Edna, no," said Beggs. "Not now, anyway."

"How about the Governor?"

"Well, she gets a hundred and twenty-five a month, as I told you."

"Governor married?"

"Got five kids." Beggs' voice grew serious. "As a matter of fact, the girl may be straight as a string for all I know. Estes is nearly sixty. But Meredith used to chase her, and then one day the Governor chased him. That was over two years ago. I reckon the Governor's afraid to fire her. I don't blame the girl a bit. I'd like to see her shake 'em both down. . . . But, listen: let me tell you something. Don't you get mixed up in it. When Meredith's drunk, he's awful."

"Me? Why in Sam Hill should I get in it?"

Beggs did not laugh. . . . "I saw you taking her in," he said soberly. "And I can tell you like women."

Martin was rather startled. He almost said, "The hell you can." He laughed. "Thanks."

"I didn't mean to insult you," said Beggs quickly.

"You didn't," said Martin. "I hope I impress the ladies the same way."

They entered Mrs. Edgell's boarding house.

Chapter II

RS. EDGELL boarded about twenty people, mostly males. She took no roomers. Her boarders were required to purchase meal tickets, cash in advance. As they left the dining room she stood at the door, and, with an old conductor's punch, took her toll of black dots, of which there were twenty on a ticket, each representing a meal at twenty-five cents apiece. She smiled as she did this, and the smile said, "This looks commercial but it isn't. We all understand. Without our tickets we would get all mixed up. . . . Next!"

She punched with considerable adroitness, compressing her lips and measuring carefully with her eye; but once she had fixed on the place she squeezed blindly, half closing her eyes. . . . She was a fat woman with damp cheeks, streaked with red. . . .

Martin took his meals there for five weeks. Meanwhile, with the exception of his first night in Stantonville, which he spent at the Commonwealth Hotel, he occupied a room at the place where Beggs lived. This was neither a boarding house nor a rooming house. It was a heavily mortgaged dwelling nearly square in design and almost paintless, wherein a colorless widow hung on to life, apparently unable to bring herself to the admission that she was reduced to taking roomers. She was refined. Martin saw her only three or four times, and he could remember distinctly only two of these: when he arrived and when

he left. He left on the same day that he quit taking his meals at Mrs. Edgell's. He had found a place where he could have both room and board, the Evans'.

Edna and he did not discuss price when she first suggested his coming, and when, a week having passed since his arrival, he spoke about it, she flushed. "I don't know what to say."

"I don't either," said Martin.

"I'll ask mama." Her cheeks were still glowing when she came back. "She says seven dollars a week."

Martin counted out seven dollars. It was Saturday, pay-day. "That's too little, Edna. I think it ought to be eight anyway."

She looked up at him, her pretty teeth flashing. "I didn't get you out here to make money."

The Evans family lived on Pine Street, about twelve blocks from the *Gazette* office. It was not a good neighborhood. Appraising it, Martin thought of Louisiana Avenue, Carrolton, where the Ward boy lived. Along the street people were always moving in and out. Few seemed to own their homes or to take an interest in their yards. Men sat on the front porches in their shirt sleeves. In the back yards clothes lines sagged: the underwear, and especially the men's, was heavy.

Edna's father, who was a tinsmith, came home at night so tired that he used to fall asleep at table. But not until after he had eaten. He was a small, grubby man, but he had an enormous appetite. He sucked his teeth. Or else he picked them, using his fingers, which were blunt, with torn nails. He would look at his fingers after the operation, and when he was successful he seemed relieved. . . . Especially shreds of meat. These he

rolled carefully and, his frankness suddenly vanishing, disposed of mysteriously.

Mrs. Evans was grey-haired, round-faced and motherly. She called Martin "Martin" almost from the start. She seemed to wear nothing except aprons. Most of the time she spent preparing meals, serving them and washing dishes. She and her husband slept in a rear room on the first floor, just off the kitchen. Edna's room was on the second floor, at the head of the stairs; and Martin's was on the same floor, at the back. Between them there was another room. This was the brother's, Ed by name, who, Martin gathered vaguely, was a news butcher on trains. He was never home.

II

It was nice, living with a woman. Martin sat at Police Headquarters, taking the dog watch, and thought about it. He felt important. He was not yet twenty-one, and this girl was his. He could have her when he wanted her and as long as he wanted her. He almost added where he wanted her, but that would be a trifle informal. . . . He laughed. It was a crazy situation: the Governor after her, Jim Meredith after her, and he, Martin, having her. She darned his socks.

He and Edna were alone on the second floor, living practically as man and wife. It was funny. Strange the mother didn't say something, or suspect something. But she seldom came upstairs, and never when Martin was at home. She was a good Methodist. Whenever she could spare time from her work she went to church. . . .

Martin tilted his chair back. It struck the police station wall with scarcely a sound. His coat, which he had taken off and spread over the chair back, acted as a pad. . . . Piano keys, broken ones, sounded that way. . . . Martin tried it again, moving his body forward in the chair until the shifted center of gravity brought the legs down with a thump. Then, very gently, he moved his body backward and thrust his head forward, much as does the sailor equilibrist on the pile of chairs at the circus. The chair balanced a moment on its rear legs, then, as though with sudden decision, hit the wall.

Martin did it two or three times fastidiously. He was restless. Presently he would put on his coat and go. . . . He looked up at the Headquarters clock: 2:15 A.M. In fifteen minutes he would call up the *Gazette*. Beggs would say, "Yep; good-night." It seldom varied. Very little had happened in Stantonville. . . . State House, undertakers, police. . . . Edna. . . . Three months of it. . . .

It was July now, and hot. Very hot. The whole town dripped heat. Leaves drooped, and particularly those of the sycamore trees, which were large and wrinkled. The wrinkles held caked dust, like the ears of dirty children.
... Martin sat listening. They were sprinkling Market Street, just outside. He could hear the horses' hoofs, and the wagon creaking. It was an immense barrel on wheels. There were spouts behind, with some sort of an arrangement that made the water come out in a thin wide fan ... flames of water. ... The driver turned it on and off from the seat, looking back occasionally to see how things were going. He did this especially when he turned the horses around.

Martin could see the wagon better than if he were looking at it. He could see Edna better when he was away from her. He could see her now. She was sitting up for him. She did this two or three times a week.

It was touching, her devotion to him. She loved so seriously. Not at all as Vada would. Vada would laugh and make childishly clever remarks. Edna did not laugh. She lay with her eyes closed, sometimes for minutes, and especially afterward. She never cried. Vada would cry. Not sobbingly, but her lashes would be wet; and then she would say, very suddenly, "Hand me a cigarette," and laugh happily.

"I am making her smoke cigarettes," thought Martin. "That is five years from now. . . . Maybe ten. Maybe never." He was depressed. He had never written Vada a line. He had sketched, in his head, many letters, and set nothing to paper. Edna had, in a way, distracted him. Her folks were common but she was not. Martin argued with himself. She was not common. She dressed in good taste and spoke well, not cleverly perhaps, but intelligently. And she was brave. She was paying for the Evans home out of the salary she got from the Governor. And she was risking a great deal for him, Martin, with nothing to gain. She knew he would never marry her. She knew, in fact, that he did not love her. He had said as much, not in words, but he had looked away when she asked. He had said, "I'm pretty young, Edna. I've got a lot of life to see yet." He was ashamed immediately he had said this. Calling himself young in order not to commit himself. If anybody else had said it he would have resented it bitterly. . . . But he didn't love her. Why should he lie to her about it . . . or to himself?

She was temporary. He would be moving on some day. She knew that. . . .

It was fascinating, reviewing his relations with this girl. Unlike most things in life, he could see all of it, from the beginning. . . . Their first meeting at the State House, Beggs introducing him. . . . Her coming up the walk; her red hat and her black-and-white check skirt. She still wore these. She did not seem to have many clothes. . . . She was proudest of her legs. Her stockings were always tight, their seams even down her calves, and her shoes were neat. . . . And her smile. The short upper lip was undoubtedly what first attracted him. . . . She wanted men. She had that look. She would be discriminating when she could, but this would not always be convenient. . . . She had slipped several times. Martin felt sure of this. The first time quite early in life. And because of this, and because of the Governor and Jim Meredith, she would never marry. No decent man would ask her. Not in this town. . . . She was clinging to Martin, centering all in him. . . . There was tragedy about it. . . .

He was talking to her now, behind the stove in the Treasurer's Office, in one of those chairs. It was a week or so after he had first met her. She seemed to be waiting when he came in. He could tell. There was a look in her eyes. There was a look in his, too. . . . And she could tell. He was dressed as neatly as possible, wearing his black suit, freshly pressed, white shirt and a black and white striped tie. It was too warm for his paddock. She had noted it before, though, and admired it. He was very clean.

"I like your clothes, Mr. Lavery," she said. . . . It

seemed odd, her calling him Mister. He knew, and she knew, that they were launched. . . .

"I like your feet," said Martin. He said it gravely, looking at her ankles. Nobody else in Stantonville would say anything like that, much less with gravity. He meant more than feet; and she knew it.

They met nearly every day after this, sometimes behind the stove, oftener out on the broad porch with the columns. She was quite open and above board about their meetings. Martin began to doubt the stories about the Governor. In any event she was apparently not afraid of him. . . .

One afternoon when she was away he walked up to the Governor's office. The door was open, and Martin could see a red carpet. He knocked on the side of the door jamb.

"Come in."

The Governor sat at his desk, doing nothing. He was smoking. In many ways he reminded Martin of Mayor Haward, in Carrolton.

Martin was on the point of saying, "I'm looking for Miss Evans. . . . She's mine. . . . They tell me you're snooping around her. . . ."

He cleared his throat. "Governor Estes?"

"Yes." The Governor wheeled about. He had a sagging, florid face.

"My name is Lavery." Martin advanced, half-extending his hand.

"Yes?" The Governor stood up. He had on a white waistcoat. Across it swung a heavy gold watch chain. His suit was of steel grey, hard-twisted stuff. On a lounge behind him was a Panama hat, bottom upward, on its side. It had no lining, or sweat-band.

"I'm the Gazette reporter," said Martin.

The Governor's expression did not change. He sat down again, his steel-blue trousers tightening over his fat knees. His eyes, a dull blue, like a young bull's, narrowed a trifle, but there was no flash of anger in them.

"Get out of here," he said.

Martin moved toward the door. "If that's the way you feel, Governor." He paused. . . . That was not very clever. . . . He felt small. Still, the Governor had not been clever either. . . .

"Jim Meredith send you over here?" The Governor leaned forward in his chair and rested one pudgy hand on a flat board contrivance pulled out from his desk. . . .

Martin faced him again. . . . "No. I just wanted to get a look at you. I've had it. . . . Good-bye." He walked out.

Outside he rolled a cigarette and walked down to the porch. . . . He stood smoking. . . . In a way it was foolish to have baited the old man. It might get Edna in trouble. . . .

Martin let his chair down hard, until it jarred him. He was angry and ashamed. He had no right to suspect her. If he did he ought to leave her house at once. It would be caddish, his staying there, paying only seven dollars a week, and Edna giving herself to the Governor. He stood up. . . . It was a damn lie. Except for her relations with him she was straight. She could have had Jim Meredith if she'd wanted him. . . . But she didn't. He, Martin, was with her nearly every night. The family said nothing because Edna contributed so much to their living. Her salary went a long way toward paying for the house. . . . Some poor families did that, let

their daughters alone . . . asking no questions. . . . And she loved him. . . . It was pitiful the way she clung to him. . . .

Martin peeled his coat off the chair back and threw it over his arm. It felt hot, the cloth, to his flesh. "Good-night." He rested one bare elbow on the slanting headquarters desk, talking to Beggs over the telephone.
... "Good-night," said Beggs.... "Say, Lavery..."

"What is it?" said Martin.

"Meredith been down there-Mr. Jim?"

"Not that I know of," said Martin. "Why?"

"He's soused," said Beggs. "On a tear. I put the paper to bed."

"I haven't see him." Martin hung up. He was rather tickled. It pleased him when people went on tears. He could understand; they became more human. . . .

III

He walked homeward slower than usual; it was so hot. There was no breeze. Edna would be sitting up. God damn it, he wished she wouldn't do that. It flattered him, after a fashion, but she seemed to be growing thin, and it made him feel uncomfortable. She was like a squaw. He had called her that, laughing.

He remembered his first call on her, before he went to live at the house. She was so obviously dressed up. She had on red silk stockings. They sat on a small spindle-legged settee in the parlor. It was narrow, and had a shiny straw seat. Apparently it was never used except for company.

They sat awkwardly.... It was plain that she wanted to be loved. "Let's go in here," she said after a while. He followed her into the dining room, through some curtains, whose rings rattled as she parted them. There was no light here; only a lamp in the center of the dining room table, dark.

She sat down. There was another lounge, larger and lumpy.

"We'll be more comfy here," she said, lowering her voice. "Parlors are so formal."

The light came faintly through the curtains from the other room, a broad band at the center and, at the sides, tiny ones. . . . Martin drew her to him, and kissed her. "You're a sweet boy," she murmured. "I could love you. . . ." Before he left she spoke of the room upstairs. . . .

She was sitting by the stove when Martin entered his room. It was funny, sitting by the stove such weather as this. There was no fire in it, of course. It was a Wilson heater, of thin blue sheet iron, ovoid in shape, with a round opening in the top, through which the fuel was thrust, wood. In the first weeks of his stay during a norther, Edna had built a fire for him, taking the chill off the room before he arose, shortly before noon. He began calling her Squaw then.

Martin shut the door quietly and stood with his back against it.

Edna's hair was in a braid down her back, and she had on only a night gown. She had worn a dressing sack at first, and had kept her hair up.

"You oughtn't to stay up like this," said Martin. "It's nearly three o'clock." He left the door, and bending

over, kissed the back of her neck, moving her braid aside with his left hand. She had light brown hair.

"I was fixing your shirts," said Edna. She scooped something out of her lap and opened her palm. "I cut these from the tails," she said smiling. They were little patches, neatly trimmed.

"To go over those holes your collars make," she added.

Martin sat down on the bed and began unlacing his shoes.

"You'll kill yourself," he said. He paused, one socked foot over his knee, the shoe in his hand, dangling. Very quietly he put the shoe on the floor.

"You act awful serious," said Edna. "Anything the matter?" There was the slightest pretension of baby talk and pouting.

Martin made no answer.

She stopped her work and rocked, dropping a finished shirt on the floor beside her.

"No," said Martin. "But you do too much for me.
. . . I don't deserve it."

He sat looking at her. . . . Just a night gown. It pleased him in a way. She was not a courtesan. She was not rouged; her hair was down, her stockings were off. And her legs looked better in stockings: all women's did.

"Faith in me," he thought.

"Sleepy boy?" she said.

"Not so very. No more than usual." His jaw muscles tightened.

Edna rose quickly, letting a shirt and some patches fall on the floor. . . . She took a step toward him and stopped. . . . "What's the matter, Martin?"

"Hell, nothing," said Martin. "Why do you ask? I haven't said anything. You act like I was married to you. God, Edna, give me a rest."

He could hear her catch her breath.

"I was going in a minute," she said tremulously.

She put her hands together, then separated them, widely.... "What have I done...? You're not going to leave me, are you, Martin?"

"I haven't made any definite plans," he said in a low voice. He stood up, one shoe off and one shoe on. "You're the one who's acting serious."

The color seemed to leave her face. "I didn't mean to, Martin. . . . I'll go now. . . ."

Martin lay awake a long time. She would come in about noon and wake him. She always did. And they would have their breakfast together, his breakfast and her lunch. Mrs. Evans would beam. . . . "Sleep well, Martin? How will you have your eggs?"

And he and Edna would walk toward the *Gazette* office together, separating before they got there. She had suggested this. Not once had she mentioned Jim Meredith or the Governor, but she had suggested their separating down town nevertheless.

Chapter III

YING in bed, Martin watched Edna cross the room, and averted his face as she bent over him. He did not want to be kissed. "No one does before he's brushed his teeth," he thought. His shoulders scarcely moved, only his head, which he turned swiftly toward the window and the wall, as a child refusing medicine.

She sat down on the bed, one hand resting on the covers. "Nearly half-past twelve, Sleepy Head. Time to get up," she said brightly.

Martin drew the sheet up about his neck. His beard felt scraggly. Edna's coming in and waking him always embarrassed him. She did it at about the same time every day, when she returned from the State House for her lunch. Dinner, it was called. She was fully dressed, and had her hat on.

Martin pushed his hair back off his forehead. "All right," he said sleepily. "I'll get up in a minute." He wished she would go.

But she moved nearer to him. His left hand lay on his breast, dead-man fashion, his closed fist a mound under the sheet, ridged at the knuckles. Edna's hand touched and closed over it, her fingers stroking gently. . . . "No kiss this morning?" She bent over and, snatching the sheet away, opened his pajama coat and touched her lips to his breast. "Please love me," she whispered. "Don't be cross." Her head sank. Her lips continued to move, caressing his flesh.

Martin lay still, staring at the ceiling. Downstairs he could hear Mrs. Evans grinding coffee. This was for him, fresh coffee for his breakfast. She loved him, this girl. She was kinder to him than anyone else in the world. She adored him; she was giving everything. . . . And yet there was something revolting about it. . . . Edna's lips had ceased moving. . . . She was pressing . . . hard . . . kissing, feverishly and a trifle noisily.

Martin drew his right hand from under the sheet and touched her head. The hand lay quietly a moment, conscious of the straw of her hat, and then he pushed, gently. . . . "Don't, Edna. Don't, please."

She stiffened up, drawing the back of her hand across her lips, which were wet. "What's the matter, Martin?" She had said the same thing last night. There was pain in her eyes, and questioning.

Martin sat up, clutching his pajamas over his heart, where she had unbuttoned them. He felt suddenly ridiculous. "Don't mind a morning grouch," he laughed. He stretched, closing both eyes and both fists. "I guess all husbands act this way."

Edna's eyes brightened. "I came home with a big idea," she announced lightly. "We're going to take the day off and have a picnic. We'll go out to the asylum grounds and take our supper."

"What about work?" said Martin.

"I don't have to go back to the office this afternoon," said Edna. "I've fixed that."

Martin sank down on one elbow and looked at her. She stood with both hands on the foot-board. She had rings, but they were not expensive ones. One was a very small diamond. The other was a blue stone, also small.

She seemed excited. "Come on, be a good sport," she pleaded. "Telephone the office and say you're sick. It's too hot to work. Mama'll fix us up a nice lunch, and you can get two bottles of beer. It will be cool out there in the woods." She said "cool" very prettily, holding the word until it sounded cool.

Martin searched her face. She was so eager and so sudden about it. "I don't see how I can," he said slowly. "That isn't any way to do, tell 'em at the last minute that I'm not going to work. . . . What's the matter with next Sunday? I'm off then."

"There's such a crowd on Sunday," said Edna. The asylum was, in fact, a popular recreation place. It had wide lawns, which lunatics kept immaculate, and gravelled drives and deep-shaded stretches of wood. Lunatics worked there too, after picnickers had departed, spearing waste paper with uncanny skill on barbed sticks, thrusting the grist seriously in gunny sacks.

"Well, I don't think I ought to," said Martin. "Beggs would be peeved; and, I meant to tell you last night, Jim Meredith's on a spree. I may have to do some of Beggs' work."

"Well, you're not going to," said Edna. "You're going with me. The *Gazette* can get along." She hesitated.
... "How did you hear about Meredith?"

"Beggs said he was soused." Martin half-laughed.
"He may be all right to-day."

"And he may not," said Edna. Her lips smiled, but her eyes were serious. "If he can get drunk, you can take a day off."

"You talk foolish, woman," said Martin. "Trot out of

here and let me get dressed. I can't go to any picnic on a Thursday."

"We're going," said Edna decisively. "You're not going to the office to-day." She walked toward the door, smiling. . . .

It was their custom to sit on the front porch a little while after the mid-day meal. Martin would smoke before they started down town together. Edna sat today in a small rocker near the end of the porch. He came toward her running his tongue under the edge of his cigarette paper. They had scarcely spoken at table.

"What's on your mind?" he asked. "You know I can't take a day off this way. Especially if Meredith's still drinking. . . ."

Edna gripped the arms of her chair with both hands. She stopped rocking. "He is, Martin. . . . Listen, don't go to the office. I'm afraid he'll hurt you. Will you promise? He's crazy when he drinks."

Martin threw away his cigarette, flipping it quite a distance out in the yard, where it struck, balanced on a grass tuft, smoking. "Why should he hurt me?" he said darkly. "What have I done to Meredith?"

"He's a dangerous man," said Edna.

"Aw piffle," said Martin. "So am I." His heart was pounding. "I thought you were through with him."

Edna seemed about to cry. "You think I'm a bad woman, don't you? They've told you about us. Somebody's told you. . . ."

"Nobody's told me anything," said Martin. "Jim

Meredith's never said a word to me . . . about you. He'd better not."

Tears were streaming down Edna's face. She felt for her handkerchief and could find none.

Martin handed her his, a fresh one, neatly folded. "For God's sake, what's it all about?" he demanded. "Why all the mystery? I'm not afraid of Jim Meredith. If he says anything to me I'll bat him in the jaw. . . . What is it? My living here? He's known that a long time, hasn't he?"

Edna rocked, dabbing her eyes and blowing her nose. "I don't know," she said brokenly. . . . "He hadn't been near me for months, until recently. I never loved him, Martin, and he never loved me. That's true. But he gets spells. I suppose it's the liquor." She paused, resuming with more calmness. . . . "I met him on the street yesterday. He made some disparaging remark about you, and I walked off and left him. He was drunk then."

"Disparaging remark." Martin repeated the words to himself. Edna would use a phrase like that. In a less serious moment she would have said "casting asparagus." He set his jaw, and spoke with his teeth closed. "What did he say?"

Edna smiled quickly. "Oh nothing. Just foolishness. You know how a drunk man talks. That didn't worry me." She thrust her hand in her waist. "But he wrote this. I got it in the mail this morning." She handed Martin a letter, envelope and all. . . .

It was a wild letter and a vile one, three pages long. It was difficult to believe that Jim Meredith could have written it. But the handwriting was his. He had used Commonwealth Hotel stationery. It was smudged. Many words had been crossed out. . . . Martin could see him writing it. He was drunk. He had written it in his head first, his lips working as he stood at the Commonwealth bar. He had not set down everything his lips had said, of course; but he had said enough. Martin tried to hold his face expressionless as he read. . . . Edna was watching him. He did not read it all, but he read enough:

You little chippie, you look out. I'll make you the laughing stock of this town. Estes is afraid to do anything, but I'm not. You said you were going straight, and that's why I left you alone. Well look out now. I'll fix this kid, Lavery, and I'll fix you.

Martin went grey. He folded the letter carefully, stripping and pressing the edges before handing it back to her. "He's crazy," he said. "That sounds like a crazy man." He looked down at Edna. "You're not scared, are you?"

Edna let her head rest on the back of the chair and closed her eyes. "Not for myself," she said, opening them. They were dry now. She looked at him steadily, her color mounting. . . . "Martin, would you marry me?" Her cheeks flamed. "It isn't true about either of them, Meredith or Estes. It's a lie."

Martin walked to the edge of the porch, and rested his hand against one of the wooden pillars. They were small pillars, a faded yellow, crudely lathed. He turned around, facing her. "You know I wouldn't, Edna. I don't love you. I've told you that."

He felt very small and mean, a cad. . . . But she was

smiling. "Here's your handkerchief," she said. She made a pretense of folding it and held it out to him. "But you're not going to the office to-day. Promise me that."

"Of course, I'm going," said Martin. "I may be a cad, but I'm not a coward. I'll be God damned if I am."

II

The day was blazing hot. At the corner he turned and waved to her. It seemed odd to be walking down town without her. She had scarcely missed a day since his coming to the house. She waved back, having procured a handkerchief, standing bareheaded at the end of the porch. Then she pressed the handkerchief to her mouth.

Martin walked slowly, talking to himself. "You wanted drama and life. Now you've got it. What are you going to do about it? Maybe he'll shoot you. . . ." There was that pistol in the desk. Martin sniffed. "He wouldn't shoot a fly."

He walked still more slowly. . . . What was the use of getting in a brawl with a crazy drunken man. . . . It would be wiser to keep away from him. . . . Meredith would cool off. . . . Martin clenched his hands. He was trying to crawl; he was a coward. . . . No, he wasn't. He'd have it out with him, by God. He'd lose his job, but what did that matter? He'd have his self-respect.

He quickened his walk. He was nearing the Commonwealth now. About here he and Edna separated each day. That had been foolish, silly. Everybody knew about it. Everybody at the State House knew it. He could tell by the way they looked at him. . . . He

walked on. It was nobody's business. He had won her fairly. He didn't pay her any hundred and twenty-five dollars a month, and he didn't threaten her. And he wasn't married.

A damp beery smell came from under the swinging doors of the Commonwealth bar. It was sour, yet cool. Martin wanted to go in and get a glass of beer. He checked himself. It would be bad to start drinking now. He walked on; he was a liar. He was afraid to go in . . . Meredith might be there, still drunk, holding to the bar rail, spitting, mumbling to himself. . . .

Beggs sat in his shirt sleeves marking the paper when Martin entered the office. "Hello," he said. "Hot."

"As hell," said Martin. He took his coat off, hung it over a chair and sat down, reaching for a paper. He wanted to ask, "How's Meredith. . . . Is he drinking yet?" But he would wait.

"You may have to help on this desk to-night," Beggs said presently. He laid his cigar down. "You know what I told you over the phone. He's still at it. I don't know whether he'll show up to-night or not."

He looked at Martin queerly. "Have you seen him?"

"Where should I see him?" said Martin sharply. He lowered his voice, controlling it, forcing in a casual note.
... "I hope he's enjoying himself."

"He is," said Beggs. "If you call it that. . . . You better keep out of his way."

"What are you driving at?" said Martin. He got up and stood close to Beggs, his body tingling.

"You know what I mean." Beggs picked up his cigar and examined it. "It's none of my business, Lavery, but I told you to leave that girl alone. She'll get you in

trouble . . . sure." He puffed. "But do as you please." "I will," said Martin. He pretended to stretch. "You say you may want me to help out on the desk to-night?"

"Yes. Get your supper early if you can." Beggs cleared his throat. "Seriously, I wasn't trying to throw a scare into you, but, believe me, I wouldn't want to get mixed up with Jim Meredith drunk."

"I thought you said he wouldn't shoot."

"Maybe he won't," said Beggs. "But he might bust you on the nose."

Chapter IV

HIS would end Stantonville. Covering the State House departments, Martin could see it very clearly. Meredith would discharge him to-night, and they would fight. He had not fought, seriously, since he was fourteen, but he could whip this man. He was lean and strong and twenty; Meredith was over thirty. Booze had hurt him, and women . . . Martin paused. . . . Women hadn't hurt him any. Edna was insatiable, but she had not hurt him. He felt as strong as ever . . . stronger. His mind was calmer. His work on the Gazette had gone smoothly; he was learning his trade. Thirteen and a half hours a day had not seemed an inordinately long trick, or every other Sunday off a meager allotment of recreation. . . . Work was recreation, life was recreation, and humorous. He had made it so, as he had promised himself on the train, and he would continue to make it so. . . . This row with Meredith was humorous. Martin chuckled. "Over a woman." He liked that; he was proud of it. Over a woman he would knock hell out of his managing editor and move on.

He would go East, where he belonged, where he could be a real newspaper man. Getting fired from the *Gazette* was good luck. It was a hick paper. Even he, a cub, could tell that. About every third story began, "As a result of"; and Beggs was always inserting in sentences the phrase "immediately afterward." Beggs also liked

"following this," meaning after this; and he preferred "stated" to said.

It annoyed Martin. He had said nothing, but it annoyed him now. It enraged him. He had been kowtowing to these hams in order to hold his job. He was through. Events labelled "As a result of" were seldom the result of at all. Damn it, there was always something deeper. Nobody took the trouble to dig it up. Beggs had no idea of the English language, and Jim Meredith didn't care. His head-lines were terrible. One of his favorite phrases was, "Without the slightest warning," referring to accidents or catastrophes. As if they were ordinarily ushered in by the blowing of sirens. Martin laughed. "Without the slightest warning, Martin Lavery landed squarely on the point of James Meredith's jaw. . . . " He paused. . . . He had never hit anybody on the point of the jaw. That was story book stuff. Strong, cleanminded young men did the hitting, deftly and with no great malice. They adjusted their cuffs afterward and straightened their neck-ties, gazing with a look of halfpity at their prostrate rum-soaked victims. . . . He had read a hundred such stories. Richard Harding Davis wrote a great many. . . . They annoyed him, because they were not true. . . . In a few hours events would prove it. He and Meredith would fight messily, and there would be a lot of pushing and shouting in the office, and neither of them would be greatly hurt. . . . Years later he would laugh over it and tell somebody, saying. . . . "He was sore because I took his girl. . . . She was some girl, too. . . . " Martin laughed again. He would lie a little about the girl, about Edna. Most men did, making their casual women prettier and more

attractive than they were. Fellows at college were always picking up wonders and peaches. . . .

Martin was walking down Market Street toward Police Headquarters now, and it became increasingly difficult to control his mind. Doubtless it was because he was leaving, ending things again. . . . He almost hoped Meredith would shoot. That would have real guts to it. No maudlin pushing and shoving each other; and Mr. Fred Meredith running out of his office, and Beggs, in his shirt sleeves, grabbing one or the other of them, and the old Exchange Editor shouting, "Now hold on, Jim. . . . He's a kid. For God's sake, be sensible. . . ."

Martin's eyes lit up. . . . He hoped old Nevins would be there. Nevins wouldn't do any shouting. He might say . . . "Aw, go out on the sidewalk." And his tired eyes would be amused. It wouldn't disturb him. To him it would be ridiculous, nothing more. He had been drunk too many times himself and had seen too many quarrels over women. . . There was a word more expressive than "women," but Martin did not use it. For the moment he was writing of old Nevins and his seeing all life as ridiculous, which it was, but that word could not be printed. It would give just the requisite touch of humor, and Nevins, relating the incident, would use it and get a laugh . . . but you couldn't write it. . . . You couldn't write any of life as it was. By God, you couldn't. . . . Man did not want the truth. . . .

Martin walked along, opening and closing his hands. In his mind he was back in Dolly Love's place with Mr. Sterrett, and in his mind's mind he was in the room across the hall where he had heard the man singing. He had not been in this room at all, but he had seen the

man, red-faced and about forty-five, holding the girl at right angles across his lap. . . . She had kissed and the man had not kissed back. He had preferred to sing. He couldn't sing at home or drink as he fondled his wife. To the wife that would be coarse. She greased her face or something, and there was no abandon. . . .

Martin was suddenly sorry for Jim Meredith. Jim was married. Very likely that was his trouble. So every now and then he went on a spree and sought Edna. "God keep me from a wife like that," thought Martin. . . . His breath came fast. "From all wives. All wives must be a little bit the same."

There was very little news at Police Headquarters, nothing, which in a larger town, would be worth writing. There remained only the undertakers to do and then return to the office. He would walk very slowly, because of the heat and because also he was letting his mind run.

The undertakers. . . . God, they were funny. All three of them jolly, fairly stout, and good business men. In fiction they would be lean and have undertakers' names, as for example, Mr. Sowerberry. That was good, Dickens' selection: it gave a picture. . . . Mr. Sowerberry. But how about his picture, Martin's: Jenkins, Stribling, Scott, all body handlers and not one of them pale or thin? Two were Elks. . . . They wore yellowing elk's teeth on their watch chains. This was important, because the brotherhood was strong on funerals. The third was not an Elk. He had come to town later and had to specialize in smaller fry. Eagles, Red Men, W. O. W., Maccabees and the Ancient Order of United Mechanics. . . . There seemed to be a lot of people, members of these lodges, who died. There was one

to-day. Person was his name. Scott had him. He was an A. O. U. M. "Funeral at three to-morrow from his late residence," said Mr. Scott briskly. . . .

Martin turned to go. He had two other deaths, small ones. Since he had been in Stantonville Martin had written only small ones. The deaths of prominent citizens were common property long before the undertaker was summoned; and Beggs wrote these. He wrote them beautifully. If the citizen were prominent enough, Mr. Fred Meredith wrote an editorial also, usually a day later, that is to say, another obituary, on the editorial page, which did not state the exact time of death or the nature of the disease. Beggs specialized in these facts; Mr. Fred Meredith inclined rather to oratory and history. . . .

Martin jotted down his notes concerning the late Mr. Person vaguely and mechanically. He lived way out on the edge of town somewhere. "Person." Probably a good name for the man. Add the indefinite article and the description would be complete. . . .

"This might help your news item some," said Mr. Scott.
. . . "Mr. Person was quite prominent in labor circles."

Mr. Scott produced a small red note-book of imitation leather and consulted it. . . . "He was for years President of the Union of Eccentric Engineers."

Mr. Scott restored the note-book to his vest pocket, where also he kept two nicely sharpened pencils in a metal fastener. . . "That may not be the exact title of the Union," he said. "You know they have long names sometimes . . . like amalgamated association . . . and such as that. . . . But you can look it up. . . ."

"Yes," said Martin. . . . Eccentric Engineers. There

was some such Union. He had written of the death of a member in Carrolton. It had impressed him then. . . . They were about as eccentric as cows. . . . Poor devils. Their families bought wheezy organs on the installment plan and looked through those double glass contrivances in frames at colored pictures of the Grand Canyon and the Pyramids. . . .

"I'll look him up," he said. "There's a World Almanac in the office. That will give me the correct name of the union. . . . I've forgotten too."

II

It was nearly seven when he reached the *Gazette* building. He had dawdled. . . . He would not admit that he was afraid. . . .

Beggs stood up as soon as he entered the office. "He's in," he said, half-whispering. "Fairly sober. Don't go in there, and I think everything will be all right."

Martin stripped off his coat and took considerable time to roll up his sleeves. He hung the coat carefully over a chair back. He sat down at his typewriter, running three sheets of paper into it, two as a pad. The machine was an old Oliver, which clicked noisily. . . . He sat, head bent a little, staring at the blank paper. . . . He was a coward. . . .

"Much doing?" Beggs spoke pleasantly.

"Practically nothing at the State House," said Martin.
"A few Supreme Court appeals. Some nigger stuff at Headquarters... and three lousy deaths..."

He leaned back in his chair, rolling a cigarette.

"We got a World Almanac?"

"There's one around somewhere," said Beggs. . . . "I think it's in Jim's desk. . . . Why?"

"I wanted to get a list of labor unions," said Martin.
"I've got a death, Oscar Person, and they say he used to be President of the Eccentric Engineers Union. But that may not be the thing's name." He smiled. . . . "I know we like to be correct."

"I'll get it—the Almanac," said Beggs quickly; and he went out and came back with it, tossing it on Martin's desk.

Martin thumbed through the fine-print index until he found "Unions—Labor, List of. . . ."

The correct title was the National Association of Eccentric Engineers.

Oscar Person (wrote Martin), former President of the National Association of Eccentric Engineers, died suddenly of heart disease yesterday at his residence, No. 753 Calhoun Street. He was fifty-three years old, and his widow and one daughter survive him. He was a prominent member of the Ancient Order of United Mechanics, under the auspices of which organization funeral services will be held at three o'clock this afternoon, at his late home, the Rev. Samuel Welles officiating. Burial will be in Evergreen Cemetery. . . .

He turned without leaving his chair and laid the copy on Beggs' desk. . . . He had violated only one canon, the "the" before the name of the Rev. Mr. Welles. Beggs would strike that out. If he didn't, Jim Meredith would. . . .

"I'm all up," he said. "I'll go eat now and then go to police."

He rose, putting on his coat. . . . He wouldn't fight. What was the use? He was afraid.

As he left the office he could see Jim Meredith at his desk in his smoking jacket. . . . He was eating. There was a tray beside him, a big black tin tray . . . and he was chewing. Martin could not see what was on the tray, but he knew. . . "Minute" steak, french fried potatoes, coffee. Meredith always had these when he ate supper in the office, which was whenever he had been drunk. Martin walked swiftly by the door. . . .

He sat for possibly an hour and a half at headquarters tipped back in the chair. . . . Yes, he was a coward.

"The office wants you," said the Sergeant. He proffered the telephone receiver end first, as Martin left his chair and came across the room. . . .

"Hello," said Beggs. . . . "You'll have to go out there, Lavery. Out to Person's. . . . Did you know you forgot to state whether he was national president of this Union, or just the local chapter or what? He may be quite an important man. . . . Meredith thinks we ought to have more. . . . It won't take you long. . . ."

III

Mr. Person's late residence was not on the street car line. Martin walked many blocks. The stars were brighter even than in Carrolton. . . . He walked with his coat off. It was fun in a way, walking beneath the stars, on this last night to get more facts about the death of Mr. Person, eccentric engineer. His last night. . . . Who said it was? Meredith hadn't said a word to him,

and he was too cowardly to approach Meredith. He was doing this against his will. . . . Coming out here. Of course, Person wasn't important. If he had been a figure in the labor world the whole town would have known it. . . . Meredith knew he wasn't. He was riding him. He deserved riding. . . . It was sloppy, referring to the man as "President of the National Association of Eccentric Engineers." Shirley would have tripped him up on the phrase. . . .

The house . . . No. 753. He could not see the number, but he could tell. There were lights in all the windows, and people on the porch. Neighbors. There was no laughter, as ordinarily on porches summer nights.

Even the subdued talking stopped as Martin opened the gate and came up on the porch. It was a shabby porch, almost flush with the ground; and the house was small and shabby, like those in mill villages. . . . The front door was wide open, and Martin could see through the screen door into the parlor. There was the coffin. He could see no organ, though, which was disappointing. . . . In the corner of the room was a phonograph. . . .

Although there were people sitting in the half-light on the porch, Martin rapped on the side of the screen door, gently. A woman got up out of the group and came toward him.

He turned, removed his hat and spoke before she could say anything. "I came from the *Gazette*," he explained. "To get something about Mr. Person's life, for an obituary. . . . He was a labor leader, we understand. . . ."

The woman looked blank. She was past middle-aged, wizened, breastless, nervous. As Martin spoke she took

hold of her lower lip with her left hand and sort of pulled it. . . .

"Oh, yes. . . . I'll call my daughter." She turned to the group on the porch. . . . "Nettie. . . . This gentleman's from the *Gazette*. . . . A reporter. Will you tell him about Pa?"

Martin and the daughter sat in the small parlor, not very far from the coffin. . . . The lid was off and there was a covering over Mr. Person . . . mosquito netting or something.

"Just what is it you wanted to know?" said the daughter, clasping and unclasping her hands in her lap. She seemed about thirty. She had glossy black hair, something like Miss Dalton's, and, like Miss Dalton also, she was inclined to heaviness. She seemed nervous and rather hostile. . . . This was strange. Families usually tried so hard to think of things for obituaries.

"Something about your father's labor career, said Martin. "Was he local or National President of the Eccentric Engineers?"

The daughter looked blanker than her mother had on the porch.

"I don't know anything about that," she said with decision. . . . Her eyes wandered. . . .

"He hadn't worked for a long time," she said after a moment. "He stayed home mostly. . . . I think he did have something to do with engines once."

Martin's mind was spinning, reconstructing the lives of these people. He would use it some day, as he would some day use everything. Not to-night. . . . He was after facts now. . . . Still, his mind could not help seeing Mr. Person under the mosquito netting. He had quizzical

grey eyes, with wrinkles about them, and he liked to tell jokes. He chewed fine-cut and spat with great accuracy, his only accuracy. He ran errands for the mother and daughter and stayed longer than he should. They worried about him a lot. . . . He would come home a little tipsy. . . . Sometimes it was necessary to put him to bed. . . . He would say then . . . "Now, Ma, I'm all right. . . . I won't do it again."

Martin looked up at the daughter.

"Was he sick long?" he asked. . . . He had come for facts.

"He seemed all right up to the time he died," said the daughter. . . . "You're not going to print about his death, are you?"

Martin was frankly puzzled. "I don't think I understand," he said.

"How he died," said the girl.

"What?" said Martin.

The daughter unclasped her hands, placing one on each knee, man-fashion. She leaned forward, whispering, "He died in the back yard." She lowered her eyes. "You know . . . in the out-house. But don't say it, please. It might happen to anybody, but you know how people are. They would think it was funny." Her face flushed. "He used to go out there and read. . . . He had a copy of the *Matrimonial News* when Ma found him. . . ."

Martin stood up, holding his copy paper in his left hand. He stooped, and with his right, picked up his hat, which he had placed beside the rocker in which he had been sitting. . . . He was not in Mr. Person's parlor, but at preparatory school. . . . He was fifteen. . . . It was puzzling for a moment, and then clear . . . the

Matrimonial News. You sent a dollar for a subscription. When the paper came you found many ads. of, or for, women seeking husbands. You sent another dollar and received pictures. From the pictures you selected a woman you liked and then you received her address. He and his room-mate had done this, writing ostensibly to a chunky girl in Iowa, signing the letter "W. W. Wire. . . ."

"Oh, we wouldn't print that," he said to the daughter.
... "I didn't come for that...." He studied her as she rose, particularly her glossy black hair. It shone, but it was not clean. There would be dandruff where she parted it, and sometimes she scraped along the part with a comb.

"You might find out about the Engineer Union from some of his friends," said the girl hopefully, as she followed him to the door. "Try the Labor Temple down town. He used to go there, but that was years ago."

"That's a good idea," said Martin. He thrust his noteless copy paper in his outside coat pocket and poked at his hat. She had passed him and was pushing open the screen door for him.

"Good-night," he said.

"Good-night," said the girl. She shut the screen door softly. "Sorry I couldn't give you more interesting facts."

The neighbors on the porch ceased talking again as he

crossed it and went down the walk. . . .

So Mr. Person had died in the "back yard" reading the *Matrimonial News*. It was funny. . . . Yes, as he would like to write it. Old Person. . . . Poor old Person. He wanted romance. He wrote to a woman somewhere. He had her picture, and it fascinated him. She was young

and firm and pretty. So old Person crept out to read his letters obtained through the *Matrimonial News*... Perhaps there was only one letter. If so, he read and reread this, firing his imagination... It was true; it had to be true. Just dying as he did would be too sordid. Who would want to die like that, sitting and studying spider webs?

Martin laughed. He laughed out loud. Meredith wanted a story about Person. He would give him one: Mr. Person's romance, his romance in the yard.

When he entered the Gazette editorial rooms, Martin did not go to Beggs' office but strode straight to Meredith's desk. He stood by, and coughed. The tray off which Meredith had been eating had been removed to the old Exchange Editor's desk, vacant at night. Martin looked at it. The "minute" steak was gone. Only a few shreds of fat remained. . . . People nearly always left pieces of fat on their plates. . . .

Meredith turned in his chair. He seemed perfectly sober. There was an odor of stale alcohol. . . .

"I've got some more stuff about Oscar Person," said Martin.

"Who?" . . . Meredith rested one hand on the desk edge.

"Who? You sent me out there. . . . That old engineer." He began trembling slightly. . . .

"Oh, yes . . . good," said Meredith. . . . "Well, get it in shape." He looked up at the clock. . . .

Martin smiled. . . . "Shape, hell!" he said. "You don't want it. I just thought I'd tell you. He was eccentric all right. He died in the out-house." He took a step nearer and brought his arms forward, fists half closed

at his waist line. . . . "His case was something like yours, Mr. Meredith."

Meredith's head snapped backward, then forward. His chair creaked. . . .

"How's that?"

"I say his case was something like yours. His wife didn't suit him."

Meredith got out of his chair so slowly that it seemed almost as if he were paralyzed. He crept out. His hand crept also . . . toward the desk drawer. His face was livid. Martin felt that he, himself, was white. He was sweating, cold sweat on his forehead and around his mouth and on the backs of his hands.

Meredith had the pistol now. The desk drawer hung open, balanced, slanting downward. A touch more and it would have fallen. . . . Martin could see the loose tobacco. . . . There was a green can too.

"No, you don't," he yelled. He struck and clutched. They fell against the desk. The pistol seemed high in the air. It waved. Martin reached for it with his left hand, and with his right he continued to clutch Meredith's body, striking when he could.

He could hear Meredith's voice. . . "I'll kill you. I'll kill you, you God damn little squirt. . . ."

He seemed to be talking too. . . . "You big bum. I'll show you. Look out with that gun. . . I'll show you whether you can write letters about me. Edna told me. . . . God damn you, put down that gun."

The report of the gun did not sound loud at all. But Beggs was there, and some men from the composing room. It must have sounded loud, and their voices. . . . One of the men from the composing room had the pistol. They

were talking soothingly to Meredith, pushing him down into a chair in the corner. He was green-white and spitting, Tuph! Tuph! . . . Cottony and red. . . . He had hit him all right. Blood on his mouth and sleeve.

Beggs had Martin by the arm. Beggs was white also, but not green-white. But the red had all gone from his cheeks. . . .

He led Martin into his room and tried to make him sit down. Martin shook him off and continued to stand. . . . "It went off in the air," he said. "He didn't hurt me a bit. Pulling a gun on me. . . . I'll fix him. You wait. I'll fix him for this. . . ."

He began to cry. He sat down, feeling in the back pocket of his trousers for his handkerchief. It was damp and wadded. . . . Edna's noon-time tears. . . . Crying like a woman. He was a baby.

He swept the handkerchief once over his eyes and looked up at Beggs, smiling. "I guess I'm all nervous," he said apologetically.

He stood up again, restoring the handkerchief to his pocket, and looked down at his typewriter. "You might call it my resignation," he said, trying to laugh.

"Oh, hell," said Beggs. "Hell." He could not seem to think of anything else to say.

* * *

Martin's telegram to Aunt Feddy said:

Will you wire me here Western Union one hundred dollars. I want to go to New York where I think I can make good.

To Shirley he wired:

If it isn't asking too much will you mail me at once to 112 West Eleventh Street New York good letter of introduction to City Editor of New York Evening Sun. What is one more lie? Regards.

Martin Lavery.

Chapter V

E spoke to Edna again. . . . "What does your watch say now?" He had asked this two or three times before. It was a strain, waiting for the time to board a street car for the station. The train left at 11:42.

They sat for awhile on the porch steps in the darkness. She sat close to him, and he put his arm about her, drawing her to him lightly. His arm was under hers, and his hand lay over her breast, but he did not press. He stroked the fabric of her waist, moving one finger gently. It was a fresh waist, white, not of soft silk like Vada's but of linen, or some such material which, as she breathed, made a clean crackly sound. . . .

They were in the parlor now, on that straw-bottomed settee where they had sat on the night of his first call. It was odd, sitting there; the formality of it. Martin wondered if she had on her silk stockings. In the semi-darkness he could not tell except by feeling, and he did not want to feel. . . . He would leave her to-night, as a friend. . . . He did not love her, and he would not tell her so. . . . He could not. She was brave and loyal, but he did not love her.

"What time does the watch say now?" Edna repeated his words wistfully, with a forced note of cheeriness. She leaned forward, reaching for the watch on a table in Ordinarily she wore it on a black tape about her neck, but as they sat she had removed it, placing it on the table beside the lamp, the flame of which she turned low. She held the watch low, cupping the light from beneath, slanting the dial.

"Only ten five," she said presently. She sank back on the settee.

"Do you want to go now?"

"I'm in no hurry," said Martin. "I simply don't want to miss the train. Eleven forty-two. And I want to allow for the walk to the car line."

His voice sounded hard. He was aware of it. He was sorry. . . . They sat in silence for some time. There was no sound in the house. . . . Nor in the yard. Not even crickets. . . . In the back room, down the hall, Mr. and Mrs. Evans were in bed. They were asleep. They had told Martin good-bye earlier. . . . Edna would sit up, of course. . . .

There was a sound now. . . . Edna's breath, a taut sound, as though made by the eyes rather than the throat. She was crying. She did not sob.

Martin spoke softly. "Don't," he said. "Don't, Edna, please. I'm not worth it." He bent forward on the creaking settee, placing both hands between his knees. With his knees he compressed them.

She stroked his face, and her fingers were moist, where she had touched her streaming eyes. "Yes, you are," she said brokenly. "I love you, Martin!"

She threw both arms about him and, sobbing violently, drew him to her. "Don't go," she breathed. "Don't go yet, Martin. You can live here. You can get another job . . . easy. Don't go. Don't leave me."

"I've got to, Edna."

Edna clutched his sleeve. "Then why can't I go, Martin? I've got a little money saved. Take me with you."
... I hate this town."

Martin shook his head. "What would be the use, Edna?" He touched her hand. "But I hope you write . . . some time. I gave you that address."

She began kissing him passionately, violently . . . his lips, his eyes, the ear nearest her, over which her lips closed until her breath struck the drum, making a surf-like roar that hurt.

"You were brave," she whispered. "You lost your job for me."

"Not exactly, Edna," he said. . . . For her? He stared into the darkness. . . . Over Mr. Person. . . . What for . . . really?

She released him, and touched the front of her crumpled shirt waist.

"Yes, you did," she insisted. . . .

Martin laughed. . . . "Well, no matter. I've got to go anyway. My aunt has sent the money, and I think I'll have that letter." He looked at her intently. "I'll always remember you, Edna. . . . As long as I live. You've been good to me, and you've been square. I'll always remember that. . . . I hope you don't think I'm a cad. . . . "

She shook her head, and took his hands. "I said I loved you. Oh, Martin. . . . " There was agony in her voice. She rose swiftly and tugged at his hands. . . . "Let's go in the back room," she whispered, "or upstairs." She led him by the hand. "Plenty of time." She laughed softly. "I won't let you miss your train."

She came with him down the front steps and to the gate as he departed. At the gate she stopped. Martin set his suit case down, and turned and took her in his arms. "Good-bye," he whispered. "Good-bye, Edna." He bent and kissed her. "God bless you!" He held her to him strongly and released her.

She stood with one arm on the gate post as he swung down the sidewalk with his bag. "Good-bye," she called faintly. She pressed her fingers to her lips and threw a kiss.

Chapter VI

NE hundred twelve West Eleventh Street, mentioned in Martin's telegram to Shirley, was Mrs. Gilson's boarding house, where Martin's father always stopped on his periodical visits to New York, promoting. Seeing his Buffalo man, his Chicago man, or his St. Louis man, he held many conferences and wrote many letters in hotel lobbies, but nights and such times when he was not conferring he spent at Mrs. Gilson's. Martin himself had stopped there in the past, once as a child, before his mother's death, on the occasion of his father's first foray East after the failure of the bank; and several times after her death on his way to or from preparatory school and college.

The house used to be, and very likely still is, just west of Sixth Avenue, the second of a row of four old dwellings identical in design, color and atmosphere. All were boarding houses, all were of red brick and all had iron fences. Between the fence and the front steps, which also were of iron, were dabs of faded green called yards. In summer there were geraniums also, twelve to a yard, six on each side of the walk. They too were red, and they appeared, blossomed, faded, vanished, in precise agreement hardly surpassed by the garbage and ash cans which were trundled in and out of all four establishments at the same time each morning.

Martin was happy as he set down his suit case and pushed open the gate in the iron fence. It was about half past nine in the morning, the date July 17, 1906. He had breakfasted in a small restaurant near the Grand Central Station, absorbed less in his food than in the electric fans which turned slowly overhead, blades of yellow-brown wood whose acute pitch made faster motion inexpedient if not impossible. . . . On some of them were streamers, strips of tissue paper, red, pink and blue, but not white. White would soil too quickly, Martin reflected; and when the fans were not revolving, flies would light on them and speck them. . . . He laughed. They would speck the colored ones also, but that would not show. Life was like that: fly specks unseen were not fly specks. . . . But to hell with it. Why ponder on life now? Here he was! And with a letter to the best paper, the newspaper man's paper. Not sensationalism, truth. . . . Shirley's letter would be waiting for him. Shirley was so reliable. . . . If not waiting, it would come in a day or so anyway.

Briskly he ascended Mrs. Gilson's steps, and pulled the bell, a white porcelain knob on a wire, which was loose and clacked.

Mrs. Gilson herself opened the door. She was dressed all in black, and the cloth seemed stiff. "How do you do?" she said coldly.

"You may remember me," said Martin. "I've been here before, with my father, Mr. Lavery."

"Yes," said Mrs. Gilson lifelessly. "When's he coming East again?"

"I don't know," said Martin, "but I've come to stay with you a while. How about a room?"

"There're plenty of rooms," said Mrs. Gilson. "Come in."

She walked with him, ahead of him, up the stairs, three flights, dark stairs whose banister rails creaked and swayed when leaned against at the landing curves. . . . Martin's suit case bumped.

"There's a big room, front, on this floor," said Mrs. Gilson. She paused, panting, her stiff skirt slightly raised. "But I get eleven dollars for it. Board too, of course." She eyed Martin dubiously. "Your father pays eight when he's here, but he takes the small one . . . back."

"Give me the front one," said Martin. . . . His eyes left Mrs. Gilson's face. . . . With Aunt Feddy's money too. He ought to economize now, if ever. His father would. High prices always made his father indignant. . . . Martin could remember way back. . . . Tailors who charged forty dollars for suits; navel oranges that cost five cents a piece; those big green grapes, malagas, that came packed in cork. . . .

"Then you want the big room," said Mrs. Gilson sharply.

"Why, yes," said Martin. "Why not?" He began moving down the dark hall, bearing his suit case. "Right now as well as not. I'd like to wash up a bit."

He stood back as she flung open the room door. "By the way, have you got any mail for me, a letter or so?"

"I couldn't say," said Mrs. Gilson shortly. "There's mail downstairs for your father, marked for forwarding. Quite a few letters in the rack." She turned to go, then faced clear around again. "Same name as yours. If

you've got any mail it must be with his." She laughed harshly. "No use my reading first names, is there?"

"Certainly not," said Martin. "I'll look myself."

He came hurrying up the stairs a moment later, the envelope of Shirley's letter held lightly and unbent in his fingers. He must not bend it, that is, the letter of introduction inside; and Shirley's letter was just a line in pencil on copy paper: "Here it is. Good luck."

H

About half past three that afternoon Martin climbed out of the subway at Brooklyn Bridge and walked down Park Row toward the *Sun* building. He walked slowly, thinking. He would say, "Mr. Shirley was good enough to send me this letter. I only want a chance. I believe I can make good at metropolitan journalism." No; that sounded like a yokel, "journalism" especially. No good newspaper man used the word. . . .

At the building entrance he paused and faced about. He would photograph this scene: Push carts at the curb, three of them, one piled high with tangerines. A man selling newspapers. He stood humped up; he was a man, not a boy. His papers were on the sidewalk near a gratial to the

ing, their corners weighted with stones.

Martin looked at him a moment and then lifted his eyes to the City Hall opposite. One of the few public buildings in New York that he knew. He knew Jack's, Molly's, those places along Twenty-eighth Street and Twenty-ninth Street—the Cairo, the Bohemia, the Black

Cat; and, of course, the Haymarket. . . . He laughed. All eastern college men did. . . . If they should ask him in the Sun office, "Know anything about New York?" he would say, "Well, I know where the gals hang out." . . . Like hell he would. Why make himself out an ass? . . . If he were a City Editor, though, and a young fellow should say that to him he would be tickled. Or maybe he wouldn't. It would depend on his mood, and also how the young fellow looked and how he said it. It might rile him. He might say sharply. "What did you come to New York for—work or women?" Martin laughed again. "If the young fellow had guts and a sense of humor, he would retort, 'Both. What's wrong with that?"

"You damn fool," said Martin to himself. "You're through with that!"

He wheeled abruptly and entered the building, pushing awkwardly against a brass bar in the revolving door.

Inside he stopped and removed Shirley's letter from his pocket, and re-read the inscription on the letter of introduction: Thomas M. Wade, Esq., City Editor, the *New York Evening Sun*.

Introducing Mr. Martin Lavery.

Already he knew the letter by heart. Martin smiled. Shirley had sense. Dear Tommy: I know you are always cluttered up with cubs. But if there is a chink to shove this boy in, I don't believe you will make a mistake. . . . Regards, Shirley. . . . P. S. I am still alive.

A spiral iron stairway led up to the Evening Sun's editorial rooms. Martin found it difficult not to talk to himself as he climbed. "On this day Martin Lavery obtained work on the New York Evening Sun presenting a

letter from a friend in the Southwest." Possibly the letter would be shown in facsimile. Shirley, an old man, would always be trotting out the book—biography or autobiography. . . . He would say, "I knew he had brains. I handled his first copy. . . . "

Martin set his mouth as he stepped into the editorial rooms. Behind him he closed a metal door.

It was a large room, and noisy. Bewildering. Martin's heart beat fast. An office boy, or somebody, would stop him. But no one paid any attention to him. Way across the room was the copy desk. . . . Five or six men around it. . . . Voices, above the din of telegraph instruments and machinery. . . . "Copy! Copy boy here! . . ." The copy readers shifted in their chairs as they worked, squirmed. . . . Paper all over the floor around the desk.

Martin approached the desk. . . . It was not a desk, but a big flat table; a telephone on a long arm pivoted in its center. Just ordinary wooden-seated chairs. . . . All except one. This had arms and a leather seat, squashed flat.

A little bit of a man stood beside this chair. He did not look like a city editor, and he did not seem to be doing anything. He looked at Martin. "What is it?"

Martin fumbled in his inside pocket.

"I've got a letter for Mr. Wade."

"Well, let's see it." The little man held out his hand.

Martin took off his hat, and, relinquishing the letter, stood back. . . . Shirley might have said more. This was Wade.

The little man dropped the envelope on the floor. He seemed to read only the letter's signature, then tossed it on the desk. He turned and gazed, not at Martin, but

to his right. He made sort of a face and pointed. "I've got men falling over themselves now," he said.

Martin looked. There were a lot of reporters. Fifteen or twenty, it seemed. . . . Sprawled at desks. Most of them seemed to be doing nothing. Three or four were playing cards. One was peeling an orange, slowly dropping the peelings on the floor.

"Ever read any copy?"

"A little," said Martin faintly.

"Know anything about New York?"

"Well, in a general way, yes."

"How long have you been here?"

"Since this morning. But I've been here before, two or three times."

"Uh-huh. . . . Why did you pick on this paper?"

"Well, to be honest, I guess because Shirley knew you, and I didn't know anybody else, and I want a job."

"How is Shirley?" said Wade. "Does he like it down there?"

"Pretty good," said Martin. "It's his health, you know."

"Why didn't you like it down there?" Wade eyed him critically. . . .

"I did, as far as it went. . . . Why didn't you like it where you came from?" Martin smiled quickly to soften this.

But if Wade was offended he did not show it. His voice was placid. "What college were you fired from?"

Martin flushed. "I wasn't exactly fired. I took an engineering course at Cornell and a——"

Wade waved both hands impatiently. "Yes, I know." He sat down in his chair, on the very edge of it. "Come

in Monday," he said wearily. "I'll give you twenty dollars a week." He picked up a batch of copy paper and began shuffling it, as if angry at his own weakness.

Martin walked rapidly away from him, fearful that he would change his mind.

Downstairs he stood in the doorway of the building for possibly five minutes. He had a job in New York, on Charles A. Dana's paper. His lips moved, "Three years later he married Madeline Wynne." . . . No, three years was too soon. She would be only twenty. And Mrs. Wynne would be sending her to college. . . . He laughed bitterly. "I don't want her anyway. I want Vada."

He spun through the revolving door and stood on the steps. He would be ascending these many times—in summer, pushing his hat back, mopping his brow, in winter kicking thin potato cakes of snow from his soles. He gazed down at the sidewalk now. Park Row was black. People rushing to the Brooklyn Bridge . . . nearly running. Everybody in a hurry. The man who sold newspapers beside the steps was handing them out like an automaton, jerking them from under a strap, folding them with one hand—Suns, Worlds, Journals, Globes, The Evening Telegram. Headlines: Harry Thaw, Jerome, Mayor McClellan, Police Commissioner Bingham, the Borough of Manhattan. . . .

Martin set his jaw, and shouldered his way across the sidewalk through the crowd. New York, eh? By God, they couldn't stop him. No one could. He would be a great man. He made his way west, through City Hall Park, toward the Elevated and Mrs. Gilson's. To-day was Friday. Monday he would begin his New York newspaper career. . . . He liked that word, career. . . . He

smiled. . . . "Under the then City Editor, Thomas M. Wade."

In his room at Mrs. Gilson's he leaned close to the mirror, almost touching the glass with his nose. This was Martin Lavery at twenty.

Chapter VII

ARTIN worked madly. Everything in New York seemed big. Here the undertakers sent in their dead, and unless they were important, Tommy jammed them on the spike. Stuff from the courts and police stations, enough in an hour each day to fill the Carrolton Star—and Tommy sifted it, chucking two-thirds of it away, on tight days even murders, and especially Italians.

A child fell seven stories from a fire-escape. Martin's second day at work. He took it from a district man, sweating in an air-tight phone booth, stamping at his cigarette butt which smoked chokingly on the floor. Three pages of notes, carefully taken, names printed. His hands shook a little as he approached the desk. Tommy looked up at the clock. It was after three. "Rivington Street," he repeated. "Seven stories and dead? . . . No thanks. Seven stories and lives I might squeeze in."

Martin sat down and went over his notes and then dropped them, sheet at a time, on the floor. He was not disturbed. Tommy had the right idea. Like old Nevins, his tired eyes said, "I bucked life once. Don't let little things get your goat. This business is for cynics. . . . "Tommy, like Denny Slade, took his first drink every morning at ten.

Martin looked at the men about him. Men? . . .

Boys. Older than he nearly all of them, but boys still. . . . He would be their boss some day. Yes he would. He would have Tommy's place, or maybe Mr. McCoy's, the Managing Editor. He knew already what to put in and what to leave out of newspapers. He would say to young reporters, as kindly as he could, "Go back and write that again, son—calmly. Try not to slop over."

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. They did not fire him. Mr. McCoy had spoken to him encouragingly. Mr. McCoy sat in a cubby hole something like John Jayne Scott's, excepting that the sides ran up to the ceiling, and there was a sliding door with a glass panel. He could shut himself in, which he frequently did, sitting scrunched up in his chair as though his body hurt him. He was a small man. The day he spoke to Martin he came out of the cubby hole and stood by the sliding door, blinking. "I read that Essex Market Police Court story, Lavery. It wasn't bad at all. Give us some more."

"Yes, sir," Martin stammered. . . . His first long story was all right then. He had written nearly a column and a half. . . . About a plumber and his landlady. The plumber wore a fur coat and a pearl scarf pin. He kept raising his hand like a child at school, saying, "Now, Judge." The landlady had very blonde hair and was fat. The trouble started over a party which the plumber, a bachelor, gave, to which the landlady, a widow, was not invited. There was a keg of beer.

Lemp would have said, "Oh, no. You can't make fun of these people. They have rights."

But Tommy's eyes puckered as he read. He came over and stood by Martin's typewriter, waiting for the last sheet. Shifting his position in his chair, Martin watched him read it. Hardly a comma touched. Tommy wrote a head swiftly. "Copy!" he called irritably. "Send this upstairs."

Life was good now. Copy boys would bring you coffee and doughnuts when you wanted them; and at noon an old apple woman came. When you felt like it you slipped across to Lipton's for a drink or dodged into Perry's in the World Building. If you met Tommy at the bar you bowed, but did not ask him to drink with you.

While formal with the staff, Tommy drank with the men of the *Morning Sun*—Ed. Sill, Frank O'Halley, George Fallon, Bob Richards. They carried canes and walked very slowly entering and leaving the office: O'Halley, who said everything in his stories and got away with it, and refused to answer letters from magazines because it was too much trouble; Sill, dressed always in navy blue and wearing light colored gloves to match his stick; Fallon, the *Morning Sun's* City Editor, lean-faced and so intelligent looking that Martin felt uncomfortable in his presence, even in a bar room.

These men, and others on the staff of the Morning Sun, called the Evening Sun the little bastard sister, and meant it. They reported for work around one o'clock in the afternoon or later; and they ate their dinner leisurely, with high-balls, in the stalls at Lipton's, or at downtown Mouquins or at the Press Club. When they tried to, which was nearly always, they wrote literature—satire which stung, humor without guffaws, tragedy without a shriek.

Martin studied their work carefully. He would learn. He was not an adolescent kid. When they asked him in the office how old he was he said twenty-three.

II

New York, July 26, 1906.

Dear Aunt Feddy— I hope you will forgive me for not writing you before, but the truth is I could not tell whether I was going to catch on here in New York, and, more than that, whether I would make good.

But I have done both, and I know you will be pleased. I am reporting for the *Evening Sun*. Just a week to be sure, but I think I have the feel of things and will stick. Both the Managing Editor and the City Editor seem to like my stuff. Anyway, this was my first pay-day, and as there was nothing in my envelope except money, I guess they are going to give me a fair trial.

As yet, of course, I have written nothing of real merit. I know this, and it pleases me that I do know it. It has come to me very forcibly that you can't put all truth in any newspaper; but you can try. The other day, for example, one of the old reporters covered a story about a woman suing a man for breach of promise. When he came in I happened to hear him say to Mr. Wade (City Editor), "Looks like a shakedown to me, and what's more she's a chippie." Wade grinned and said, "Well, let's see how near you can come to it."

That pleased me tremendously. As a matter of fact, I realized in Carrolton that you could not put all truth in the paper, and I could have stood it if that man Lemp had only grinned. But he seemed to think I was crazy even to *see* the truth about life. I shall always see it, Aunt Feddy, try to anyway, and nobody is going to stop me.

I am at Mrs. Gilson's, where father always stays. He will find me pretty well established when he comes East again. I have a large room at the front of the house, and I intend to rent a typewriter. Back in my head many things are forming which I am going to write. I can't say what they, or it, will be, but it will be something that you will be proud of. It may be raw, but it will be honest. Now don't laugh—just wait.

I almost said give my regards to the Wynnes, if you see them. But never mind. However, if it isn't too brazen, you might let it be known that I am getting on here.

Only a paragraph or two more. First, I will return the hundred dollars you let me have just as soon as I have saved a little money. Second: if you are still on the library board, do what you can toward getting that position for Vada Sanderson. She is a fine girl, Aunt Feddy, even if she is a gambler's daughter.

Good-bye, and don't criticize the childish way this is written. You know good English, and I can hear you say, "Well, if he hopes to write, he'd better acquire a style." I will in time. Remember I just hammered this out.

Your nephew, Martin Lavery

* * *

Martin sank back in his chair. . . . It was after five o'clock and the office was deserted. . . . All about himself, as usual. He read the letter slowly, making typographical corrections, of which there were many, with a pencil, heavily. . . . Evening Sun stationery. Every member of the staff had a few sheets in his desk. Everybody wrote home occasionally, each telling, as he had, of his

hopes. . . . Making good . . . wait and see. They, too, had dreams of writing. Nearly all newspaper men had. Many had a half finished manuscript of some sort in their trunks. Two fellows on the staff were writing a play in collaboration. They had been at it for months. Every now and then they would work at it feverishly, and end up somewhere for a drink. Many drinks. . . . As they drank they talked of the play, and it became real. . . . Martin sat with his hands in his lap. Perhaps that was why he liked to drink. He could write then, in his mind, and it was truth. He could sit, devising similes, and it was not wasting time. . . . Nouns for verbs, verbs for nouns, hybrids, bastards, gnus of words. . . . And when he was drunk small things amused him so. . . .

He set his jaw hard and looked down at his letter to Aunt Feddy. He would tear it up. It was immature and conceited. What his mind and what his fingers wrote were so different. He could never write. He was like a negro, mumbling at life, phrasing and re-phrasing trivialities. He was a child, saying da-da at feathers, drooling over a dented celluloid ball. . . . He laughed. Very likely he had had one as a baby and had bit it. Gummed it, to be exact. . . . Serious business with babies. . . . Their saliva was clear and syrupy, with great tensile strength, liquid spider web. . . . Mothers wiped their chins vigorously, with a swooping rush; and if there were women neighbors in the room, looked around at them and laughed. . . .

"Hell," said Martin. "Mail your letter." He folded it and licked the envelope flap suddenly and almost doggedly. He would mail it. If he tore it up and attempted to rephrase it he would not write at all. That had been the

trouble with Vada. He had been away nearly six months and had not written her a word. He was afraid, afraid that what he would write would not be clever enough, or too obviously clever . . . strained and smarty. . . . But he would mail this. He had neglected Aunt Feddy shamefully. Besides, he had to talk to somebody.

He walked slowly down the stairs, the letter in his hand. That was it: he wanted somebody to talk to, frankly. He laughed. . . . About himself. It would be fun to have even old Edna here. She would not fit in exactly, but she would be company. She would listen so attentively to everything he had to say. She always did. . . . Funny she hadn't written him. Possibly her heart was too full, as his was, hers with love for him, his. . . . He paused. . . . What was in his heart? . . . He could not answer. But he was plagued eternally.

He crossed Franklin Square and entered the General Post Office, where he broke a five dollar bill to obtain a two-cent stamp. He stood in the lobby, counting his money. If he were honest, he would buy a five dollar money order and begin re-paying Aunt Feddy's loan in installments. . . . Methodical men did that. . . .

Chapter VIII

Pay day, his seventh week at work. Martin stood on the Sun steps and shoved his money, loosely rolled, in his trousers' pocket. He was doing rewrite now, and making good. Twenty-five dollars a week already, a raise of five. Callow, hell! Frequently Tommy tossed a batch of copy at him saying in that high-pitched voice of his, "Take the sobs out of this," which Martin did. . . . He was working hard, getting on. Daylight ahead.

And he had his typewriter . . . rented. It was a rebuilt machine, olive green in color, clacky and metallic in sound and action. He had chosen the make because he had learned on one in Carrolton. . . . Three dollars a month. The first installment he paid cash, and signed some sort of a paper guaranteeing future payments and the implement's ultimate safe return, giving Tommy as his reference. . . .

"You too?" said Tommy. There was a curious look in his small faded eyes. He waved the reference slip in the air, drying his scrawly signature. "Mail it back," he said, crisply. "I guess I've signed a thousand." He paused, and his voice became weary. "What are you going to write?"

Martin flushed; he stood awkwardly. "Mostly practice."

Tommy's eyes softened, and a smile touched his lips

with peculiar suddenness. "Don't let me discourage you. I've been through it—the itch."

"And you don't scratch any more," said Martin.
"That's it. . . . But good luck to you. . . ."

Martin continued standing on the steps. It was nearly dusk. Writing! He had been trying nearly every night since he rented his machine; but always he tore his products up. . . . No good. Plots, plots, strained introductions and vapid endings. Life was not like that. There were no beginnings, and no ends. . . . Thump, thump, thump. . . . On a chair in Mrs. Gilson's third floor room, the cloth seat leveled with a folded quilt. This was fun, trying to write . . . drama. On an old quilt in a faded velvet chair, under a misty Welsbach light.

Thump-thump, thump-thump, thump-thump. Type-writer keys, though small, tramped so noisily overhead. The folded quilt softened the impact. . . . Thuft-thuft, thuft-thuft, not thump. He was writing those words . . . thump-thump, thuft-thuft. Thuft was coined, and it was not good. There was no symbol for the sound. Lord, the feebleness of man's effort to depict life. . . .

Martin stepped down on the sidewalk. He felt suddenly helpless and lonely. It would be a good night to get drunk . . . or something. A fellow had to have some recreation. He was of half a mind to go back in the office and look for a straggler and say, "Come on. Let's bum around a little." But that would come later: He knew no one intimately as yet, only names and faces. He smiled, "Give me time, boys."

He passed south along Nassau Street and turned into Park Row. . . . Trolley car back of the Post Office, motionless on the siding. Motorman leaning over the rear fender, his face red, chukking at the trolley slot with an iron bar. . . . Martin stood watching him. Dinner was waiting for him at Mrs. Gilson's. Why prowl around alone? He turned north, took three or four steps, faced about and moved south again, pausing in front of a novelty store. Windows very brightly lighted . . . jewelry, umbrellas, stationery, canes.

He entered and asked to see a cane. "What kind?" asked the clerk.

"Just a fairly good cane," said Martin. He accepted the first one proffered; hefted it, thumped its ferrule on the floor, bent it slightly as one bends a sword, and asked the price.

"A dollar and a half," said the clerk.

"I'll take it. And I want some sort of a cheap note-book, too. Sort of a diary."

The man handed him one with dates and days in it—Monday, the umph, Tuesday, Wednesday——

"No, not that kind," said Martin shortly. "A plain little book for keeping track of things."

The man produced one, price thirty-five cents; and Martin took it, along with the cane.

He felt rather silly. But the cane was company in a way; and now that he was a full fledged New York newspaper man he had better begin jotting down impressions from time to time. This would help him later in his writing. . . . Thoughts would escape him if he did not keep some sort of record. It was methodical, but he would have to come to it. Tolstoy did it, Hawthorne, a great many writers. . . . His notes would be brief, reminders only. If he wrote them out, or attempted to, their vitality would go. . . . He hated most words any-

way, they were so weak. What he wanted to put down was images. Frequently, used words were eunuchs. . . .

He stood a moment in front of the novelty store, then moved down Park Row a few doors and entered Hahn's bar. He stood drinking a high-ball. . . . Whoever owned Hahn's had taste. All the walls were covered with oil paintings, and good ones. There was an excellent portrait of a woman in a hat, wearing a red-and-white striped waist. And the pictures were well arranged, over each a down-shaded electric light bulb as in museums.

Martin laughed. . . . The Stag went in for lynching photos. He could see them plainly on the wall, back of Nagel's desk. He thought. . . . Man cheated, always and inevitably. Made rules, and to keep his sanity kicked over them in strange ways. Lynchings were horrible. Normal men, citizens, men of family, deplored them; but at the Stag they liked to look up at the Gleeson collection. It was license, freedom. They were in a bar room. They could spit in the cuspidors. They could drink, looking up at nudes, or, approaching the cigar counter, study the faces of young negroes hanging from rope ends.

"Normal men," thought Martin, "yet all in some measure demand it—escape. I demand it in everything." For the moment he was elated; then he shook his head. "No, I must control myself. With patience I could have won Madeline." He laughed harshly. . . . "By lying! I could have kept my mouth shut and lied, biding my time, finally eloping with her. . . . I could have lied to Vada from the start and had her months ago." He clenched his hands. He would never lie to her. He would have her without lying. . . .

He drained his glass, tilting it almost upside down, until the neat square lump of ice bumped against his nose. He stepped back from the bar, munching a cracker. He would not lie to himself to-night, by getting drunk. Any bum could become a great man that way.

He ate his dinner in a Childs' restaurant near by, and roamed.

II

Fourteenth Street, past Tom Sharkey's place and those nickelodeons; the shadows of Irving Place and Gramercy Park; Twenty-third, between Sixth Avenue and Broadway-rows of department stores, windows dark. . . . A light in one; a window dresser working, placing men and women dummies to suit his taste; smoothing a skirt over an iron bar, not legs; adjusting a man's collar and tie beneath a bisque face smiling vacuously. . . . Shivery work at that, if he has imagination. . . . The Eden Musee over there. . . . That girl breathing on the operating table, one white breast exposed. . . . They must have used a small bellows and a motor. . . . His mother took him. . . . They were at Mrs. Gilson's then, with two rooms. . . . She said, "Martin, I'm sorry I brought you here. But people seem to like this sort of thing. . . ."

Martin swung along. . . . If he could get thoughts like these on paper. . . . Or were they any more vivid than everybody had? He would like to write now. . . . Enter a saloon and sit down at a corner table and write. . . . But he wouldn't. Men at the bar would turn around and stare at him, and anyway, as soon as he touched pencil to paper the guts of everything would drop out. . . .

He passed several saloons, but did not enter. Beneath the swinging doors he could see men's legs, one leg only in many cases, the other being on the rail. "Storks at the bar," he laughed, and wandered on.

He walked to the Twenty-third Street subway station, rode to Grand Central and got out. He entered. . . . Strangers in New York did this, roamed around Grand Central, visited the Metropolitan, the Aquarium, the Flatiron Building. In a month or so their interest died.

He looked about him in the station. . . . Clocks, clocks. . . . A clock on each side of the information pagoda, four of them. And all keeping the same time, chanting in perfect unison, nine-four, nine-five, nine-six. They were chanting the seconds also and the split seconds, but these were shrill notes, too shrill for human ears, sounds unheard of which physicists wrote ponderously. Martin thrilled. Given to approximations in everything numerical and mechanical, there was fascination about it, this marvellous feat of synchronism performed before his eyes. Man, when he chose, could measure the distance to the stars. . .

He wandered west, along Forty-second Street, turned south down Fifth Avenue, retraced his steps north, along Sixth, and Broadway. . . . New York at night. Cabs in front of Jack's, the drawn silk curtains of the Beaux Arts, Churchill's, Rector's, Martin's. In time he would know all these places intimately. He would be famous then, a great novelist or a playwright. Both. It would be wonderful to be a playwright. . . . The first night. He would have on a new tuxedo and would be groomed immaculately. If he spoke in response to a curtain call he would say only a few words, a whimsical phrase or so, no

more. He would be young, too; and they would note this in the audience. "Why, he's just a boy. Doesn't look more than eighteen. They say he's a newspaper man."

Martin walked along. Very vividly he could see himself on the stage, speaking. He smiled. If he wrote a musical comedy first there would be women in the play, girls, lots of them. . . . He frowned. He thought too much about women. It seemed almost as if he were writing his imaginary books and plays, dreaming, working, planning his whole life, so that ultimately he might have a woman. . . . Well, why not? Biologists said that after food and shelter man sought woman. . . . The urge to procreate, the instinct to perpetuate the race. . . .

Martin laughed out loud. Noble man! Like the race track gamblers striving altruistically to improve the breed of horses. His lips moved. "This city to-night... ten thousand rooms... the red glow in the sky.... Man perpetuating his species.... Well, that's all right. I cheat there too. Always shall. I've never thought of children. I don't want to get married. I'm interested in myself, not in the human race..."

If he wrote a play he would surely have a girl. Possibly a dancer. She would have clean white teeth and a young body, lithe and strong, and when she laughed he would laugh with and at her, regardless of whether what she said was humorous or not. She would be a child, and yet she would understand life. Other men would want her, and in rebuffing them her laugh would be enough. "They say Martin Lavery and she. . . . You know he wrote the play. Have you seen her dance? Well, you've missed something."

Martin laughed happily. All his. In her dressing room she would say with mock seriousness, laughter dancing in her eyes, "Stop it, and unhook the dress! You've got all night to kiss."

He raised himself on his toes. Vada would say that. She would.

Chapter IX

FIFTH Avenue was quieter than either Sixth Avenue or Broadway, and in walking home, Martin chose it purposely. There would be no surface cars and no elevated, and at this hour few motor cars.

He passed Sherry's along Forty-fourth Street and turned down the Avenue, swinging his stick. He raised the stick, holding the handle with his left hand, running his right along the smooth surface of the shaft. . . . It was five years from now. . . . Martin Lavery, playwright and great newspaper man, going down Fifth Avenue from his club to his lodgings, twirling his stick.

"Stick, hell," said Martin, and his voice audible. "You mean cane, not stick. And you mean room, not lodgings. . . ."

At Forty-second Street he paused while a trolley car and some taxis passed, standing erect at the curb, his stick almost perpendicular and tapping like a blind man's, gently impatient. There were bright lights here and pedestrians, and he held himself rigid, a man-about-town, a bachelor obviously, beating homeward down the Avenue at midnight, chuckling over his escapades. . . .

The wide walk in front of the Library, and shadow; Knox's, at Fortieth Street, the show window curtains drawn. . . . Tiffany's, on the other side of the street, at this distance a white cliff, an immense white cliff to which swallows came, windows their nests.

Martin removed his hat and swung it, brushing back his hair. He would let his mind run. New York! He had conquered it. He paused, depressed. Could he conquer it. . . . Could he hold out five years—two years? Women and liquor. . . . He would always be slipping there. . . .

He passed the Waldorf. The bar was still open. . . . He might stop and have a night-cap, a gin rickey. No. he thought too much about liquor, too. . . . Shirley had said it would get him, and it would. He knew that. He must live sanely and sensibly to survive in New York. . . . God, what a place to live. They slammed the Elevated gates so hard; and the subway-rows of ads., screaming reds that hurt, greens which were not soft, sickening yellows. . . . That damn fool pink-faced barber with the puckered lips, holding the Ed. Pinaud bottle. No. I don't want any of that smelly stuff on me. . . . The Glastenbury troupe. Four or five of them on those steps in their underwear—boy, youth, middle-aged man and the old guy with whiskers. Proving possibly that union suits didn't wrinkle and that the flaps stayed closed. Sort of he-manikins. . . . Wonder who would pose for a thing like that? Some Sterrett, maybe. The world was full of them. . . . Dear Mr. Sterrett: I am enclosing an advertisement from a New York subway car. When you are through with being a Sunday School Superintendent, perhaps this calling will appeal to you. If it embarrasses you at first, that is to say, if at first you are a trifle timid about what others will think, you can wear a mask. . . .

Martin was chuckling, but he was angry at himself.
... Subways did not affect practical men as they affected

him. They rode stolidly, other men did, sat stolidly or stood, one hand in the strap, the other holding their newspaper, adroitly folded. . . . The whole car frothy with newspapers. . . . At the curves the mass moved like popping corn. . . .

The way he lived, probably; and the way his mind fought. If he didn't watch out he would be like old John Trent on the *Evening Sun* copy desk. He was thirty-four and looked fifty. His body didn't matter. When he drank he tried to write poetry, and cried. When very drunk he stood at the Brooklyn Bridge and, although he was a Catholic, tried to start a fight by shouting, "To hell with the Pope," and succeeded.

He was heading that way already. Who could keep his health like that? Booze, cigarettes, eight hours of mad work each day and a week-end bat. Here he was, in New York, succeeding, and yet, as Aunt Feddy said, an alley cat. . . . No spiritual relief, absolutely none. No thoughts of decent women, nothing. Not a God damn wholesome thought. . . .

That was like him, too; groping for something spiritual, then linking it with profanity. It was so true of him. It was difficult to understand his two natures, one, hard, cynical, sneering; the other, gentle, kind . . . yes, he would say, poetic. He had never written any real poetry; that verse he had planned for the Cornell *Widow* was doggerel—but inwardly he tried so hard. . . .

Viewed from your hills, O Undergrad., Miss Broadway seems a lady fair, Who whispers soft, "Come to me, lad, And watch me comb my golden hair." But don't you let her fool you, Stude: Come closer and you'll see her paint. I thought she was a lady once, But take it from me, boy, she ain't!

For week-end jaunt or college spree She makes a pippin for a lark; But when you live with N. Y. C. She'll use her hat-pin in the dark.

Miss Broadway used to be my pal When Dad paid for the taxi's honks, But now I seek a modest gal, Like some side street up in the Bronx.

Martin held the verse in his mind. . . . "Ain't" and "stude" in the second stanza were bad. "N. Y. C." was smarty. It would go, though. Everybody would think he was being cynically flippant; but as poetry it was rotten. He would not send it; he would keep it, as he kept all his thoughts, never finishing them. Old sailors in homes and inmates of almshouses did that with the little ships and things they whittled out. He was like an inmate of an almshouse, sitting all day with his chair tilted back against the wall, thinking, sometimes in the sun.

He would have good friends on the *Evening Sun* staff soon, and they would not understand him. To them he was already posing as a cynic. They would think that all he cared about was getting drunk Saturday night and

having a party. And his coarse comments would shock even them, newspaper men. Damn them, they ought to know that things should be perfect—women, flowers, stars, the honeysuckle vines. But they weren't, and so he joked about them, a heart-sick mother striking her harelipped child, then bursting into tears. . . .

Damn practical men! What did they know about life? They knew nothing. No, they felt nothing. Objects, people, life—they examined them and put them down amused, their strong hands still cold and antiseptic. . . .

Martin groaned. . . . "I try to, but I can't. They

trample me. . . . God give me strength."

He quickened his pace, restoring his hat, pulling it firmly on his head. . . . He held the stick at its middle, straight down at his side. . . .

Way down on lower Fifth Avenue in the shadows, mooning along. Perfectly sober, but talking drivel. Nobody understood him! The stock phrase of failures, ham poets and sallow debutantes. He would be writing home next saying that he was lonely and that the gr-e-at City was too much for him.

He stopped and lit a cigarette, deliberately striking the match on his trousers.

He looked up, puffing, twirling the match from him until it sang. . . . He was below his street, nearly to Eighth Street. . . . The Brevoort across there, lights in the basement grill. . . . Men and women drinking.

Martin turned abruptly west at the corner of Eighth and walked rapidly toward Sixth Avenue. If he stopped and had another drink he would get drunk. If he had the right girl he would stop. She would drink with him, sipping at first, and then carelessly and with a fling,

striking her white teeth against the glass, laughing. . . . Vada would drink like that. He was depressed. Debauching Vada. . . . What right had he? He walked on.

The gas jet burned low in Mrs. Gilson's hall at night, and after midnight it was just a blue smudge.

Martin quietly opened the door and stepped in.

Slowly he began ascending the stairs, grasping the banister rail heavily, pulling himself. He was tired. He would begin to-morrow, living more sensibly. Why burn himself out?

He paused on the third or fourth step and looked back, and down, at the mail rack. As he had not been home to dinner he had not looked to-day. He leaned over, squinting; but in the dim light he could not see.

He stepped down and turned up the light a little and moved to the rack. . . . He sighed. . . . Something for him. Something from his father, papers. He took them, a fat roll of *Stars* from Carrolton.

Martin held the papers loosely with his stick as he climbed the stairs. As he entered his room he tossed them carelessly on the bureau in the darkness, and lit his Welsbach.

He stood at the bureau unbuttoning his collar. As his eyes got used to the light he looked down at the roll of papers, blinking. . . . Red ink, an edge visible. Funny for Carrolton. . . . Big headlines. . . .

He poked at the roll, then, with his forefinger, ripped it open and flattened out the top paper.

His voice came softly, "My God. . . . My God."

There was a streamer in red across the entire front page:

HUGH MATTISON ASSASSINATED

Below, the head lines said:

COUNTY ATTORNEY SHOT AND KILLED BY JIM SANDERSON AT THE STAG SALOON

SANDERSON MORTALLY WOUNDED BY OFFICER SLADE

"Well," said Martin. "Something's come true."

II

He dropped the paper and seized the top one of the remaining two on the bureau. . . . Big head lines still, across the page. . . .

SANDERSON WOUNDED DIES IN JAIL

"In the County Jail at exactly two-fifteen this morning. . . ." Martin sat down on the bed, staring at the head lines and that opening sentence. . . . Lemp wrote that, interlining Shirley's copy. . . . As if that made any difference, the precise minute of his death.

His hands sank, until the paper touched his knees. He raised them again, reading once more. He was quite calm as he put on his collar. He knotted his tie in the darkness as he went down the stairs. More noisily than he intended he shut Mrs. Gilson's front door. On the sidewalk outside the iron fence he walked rapidly; he ran. "Sanderson, wounded, dies in jail." Nearly the same rhythm as a sentence in Kellogg's Grammar. . . . Crazy to be thinking of that. . . . The sentence was, "Truth crushed to earth will rise again." Another one went with it. He had diagrammed them both. . . . "Error, wounded, writhes in pain, and dies among his worshippers."

He could scarcely shake the sentences from his mind as he entered an all-night Western Union office on lower

Broadway, not far from the old St. Denis.

"Full rate," he said, "and send the address under the signature also." His inky fingers shook. "Wait a minute. Let me read it again." He held the message a moment:

If I can be of any assistance to you, Vada, do let me know. Now that you are alone, why don't you come to New York? I am terribly sorry about it all. If you care to, wire me at the address below.

Martin Lavery.

Silly, putting in the commas, and the question mark after "New York." They were seldom, if ever, sent in commercial transmission.

"That's all right, I guess," he said, pushing the message toward the waiting operator.

"What's this name . . . Miss V-a-d-a Sanderson?"

The operator held his pencil on the words.

"Yes," said Martin, "only you don't pronounce it so

broadly. It's Vada. The spelling's right, though, and the address. Good-night."

* * *

He sat up smoking a long time after reading the accounts. Only a line or so suggested the real truth. He read again:

Sanderson, whose gambling place had for years operated unmolested, apparently lost all control of himself when the County Attorney entered his private office and told him that he must close up.

While Sanderson made no attempt to escape after he had fired on and mortally wounded the County Officer, he bitterly resented Officer Slade's request that he ride to Headquarters in the patrol wagon. Words followed, and, Sanderson still being armed, Slade fired in self-defense. He was the first on the scene, having been notified of the shooting by an unknown citizen, who telephoned Headquarters.

Sanderson, who was forty-seven years old, is survived by one child, a daughter, Miss Vada, nineteen. She declined to make any statement. . . .

Denny Slade, eh? They were old friends, too, Jim and Denny. Many a free drink Denny had had in Jim's bar. He always called him Mister—Mr. Sanderson. . . .

"Hello. Hello there! For God's sake, Central...

Police Headquarters? Well, listen. Get somebody over here right away to the Stag Saloon. Hugh Mattison's been shot. Jim Sanderson shot him... Yeah."

Denny running, tucking in his sweaty shirt, steadying his holster, which jounced as he took the curbs. . . . He had been half asleep at the desk, and he had flung his coat on, the collar up behind, part of the tail caught over the butt of his gun. . . . "You come along with the wagon, Joe. And get word to the Chief. I'll go afoot."

Denny, panting, pushing his way through the crowd at the Stag. "What's the trouble, boys? Where're they at? Where's Mr. Mattison? Is he hurt bad?"

"Here I am, Denny, right here." Jim, dead white but calm, standing at the end of the bar. "Here's my gun, too, if you want it. He's in there," pointing with his good hand.

The Stag's back room, four or five men bracing Hugh at a small table. . . . "His collar ain't hurtin' any. Leave it alone and unbutton his vest. Let him lie back. Don't make him sit up. Has anybody got hold of a doctor yet? . . . Brandy, not whiskey. . . . Watch out for his head there. . . . Let him spit if he wants to. . . . Who's got a good clean handkerchief?"

"Here's Officer Slade now. Yes, everybody's gone for doctors. . . . We don't know. Just a few words and then two quick shots. Right at the end of the bar there. They went in Jim's room first, just for a minute. . . . Through the lungs, looks like. . . . That's all right: use his own handkerchief. . . ."

Crowds passing the Sanderson place, buggies, whites, negroes; kids, a crowd of them, some sitting on the curb on the opposite side of the street under the dusty sycamores. . . "Jim Sanderson's daughter. Wonder what she'll do now?"

"I wonder," said Martin, and lay long awake.

Chapter X

RS. GILSON, in her seventy-fifth year, could hang window curtains unassisted, but once she stepped out of her rôle as boarding house keeper, her flame of life burned as blue and thin as the gas in her lower hall.

She was not a tolerant person. Although she would uncomplainingly make small loans to boarders she liked and carry indefinitely those in real distress, she was uncompromising when it came to morals: and to Mrs. Gilson morals meant one thing.

During the first few days of Martin's stay at the house, a thin, red-haired girl on the floor below him entertained two men friends in her room one night, serving Brie cheese and beer. The party was harmless enough; but after the third or fourth drink the callers unfortunately began singing Sweet Adeline, and Bring the Wagon Home, John. Fascinated by their own artistry in swipes, they sang louder and louder, until Mrs. Gilson ascended the stairs and knocked violently on the door. Next day she asked the girl to leave.

Martin had heard about this, and he thought about it as he ate his breakfast next morning. He scarcely ate, thinking. In books, plays—everywhere but in life—he would prepare happily and feverishly for Vada's coming. He would be managing editor of the *Evening Sun*. With special care he would select their apartment and her bed-

room furnishings. . . . Eagerly he would watch her face as she first stepped into the room. "Oh, Martin! You did this? You!" . . . He would take her in his arms then and hold her close, patting her. . . . He might say, suddenly releasing her, "I had a little help with the color scheme. But I picked the mattress unassisted." . . . She would look up at him, biting her lip, her color mounting. But her eyes would laugh. . . .

Martin sighed. "You poor dub." He pondered. . . . Twenty-five dollars a week and a boarding house. Although he had not written, she would hear, before her departure, of his "success" in New York. His telegram implied success. Besides, word always got around back home, the facts vastly exaggerated. "He's on the staff of the *New York Sun* now. Pretty good pay on those big papers. Responsible position for his age." . . .

He must not see her disillusioned when she came. They would manage somehow. They would live together, and he would write. Keep his job, but write. Love her and write! . . . He clenched his teeth: his thoughts were not fair to her, nor worthy of him. He would have to go very slowly. . . . This was so wrong, planning cold-bloodedly to possess her now that her father was gone. . . About the meanest thing he ever did. He would be firm, though; he would not marry. Marriage would spoil it all. Vada would understand; her temperament was like his.

II

Mrs. Gilson poured coffee from a tall imitation silver pot which had peeled in spots. She held out her hand for Martin's cup as he raised his eyes and cleared his throat.

"No coffee, thanks," he said. . . . "Mrs. Gilson. . . ."
Mrs. Gilson kept her hand on the coffee pot handle,
which, by now, was cool. . . . "Yes." She had a way of
setting her mouth.

Martin felt himself grow red. This was crazy; his telegram had hardly got there. She would not come: it was asking too much . . . yes, of God. . . . But he spoke:

"I may have a friend coming here, Mrs. Gilson. A young lady. She hasn't any friends in New York, and I thought this would be a nice place for her to stay." His whole body was hot. "We used to be in the same Sunday School class as children."

"How long do you suppose she'll stay?" Mrs. Gilson said only that, and her words were without inflection.

Martin pushed his chair back, still sitting in it. He was relieved. This woman had no curiosity and no imagination. If Vada came she would scarcely look at her. She could not read eyes or faces; she could read only noises and flashy clothes. . . . But he must be casual. . . .

He got up. "Oh, she'll probably stay quite a while. I don't know though. She may not even come. I simply wanted to make sure about a room."

"Well, I guess she can have one," said Mrs. Gilson. She sharply italicized "she," and the word cut through Martin's abdomen like a knife. She... She... He should have specified what room, the big one back of his, which was vacant... But he must be calm.

"Fine," he said, and walked away. It was Sunday, no work; and he could plan and think.

The large rooms at Mrs. Gilson's, of which Martin had the front one on the third floor, were quite large, possibly 18 x 18. They had high ceilings of grey-white plaster in whose center were circular frescoes with many curlamacues much like the frosting on big cakes that are exhibited in bakery windows. Some time or other chandeliers had depended from these, as was attested by a pipe-plugged hole; but this must have been many years ago, when the house was not Mrs. Gilson's but a private home.

At times, when families of fairish means stopped at Mrs. Gilson's, they took both the large rooms on a floor and made a suite of them. It had occurred to Martin when he first arived that, if he ever got a room-mate, he would do this, using his room as a sitting room, and the rear room as a bed-room. Between them was a lavatory, that is to say, an old fashioned wash-stand with a bowl of blue-striped marble, boarded in below to hide the plumbing. The bowl was plugged by a thin rubber stopper on a chain which had been broken and never mended. During his occupancy of the front room Martin had had the exclusive use of the lavatory; together with the drawers and clothes closets that went with it. The door leading to the rear room was locked, and the key was gone. Apparently the rooms had not been used together in a long time, for the little metal flap over the key-hole was stuck fast, glued by paint.

After breakfast Martin stood at the threshold of the lavatory, looking at the locked door. Yes, Vada should have the back room, and the lavatory. He laughed, "Kind of you, unlocking the door." He paced, smoking,

returning every now and then to the door. . . . She would come. She had daring, passion, imagination. And she loved him. She had said so the night he left Carrolton.

He returned to the locked door. Of course she would come. She *had* come. He was moving up Mrs. Gilson's walk with her, carrying her bag. "This is Miss Sanderson, of whom I spoke." They stood in Mrs. Gilson's front hall. . . .

No, he would be meeting her first. Grand Central. He smiled. She would come that way. . . . "The water level route." . . . People who had not travelled much nearly always chose it. . . . Buffalo, Niagara Falls. . . .

He was meeting her now . . . those clocks again. What time? Say, 6:15. . . . Railroads chose odd times, fifty-threes, forty-ones. But he would say 6:15 P. M. . . . even.

He laughed: he was early of course. Who wouldn't be? Pacing back and forth. Six-eight, six-nine, sixten, six-twelve. . . . Martin raised his hands and tightened his tie. His hands shook. He dropped his cigarette on the station floor and stepped on it quickly, as one checks a rolling coin. A man in blue was writing something on the board: Number Eighteen—Track forty-seven. . . . On time.

Her train. . . . She would be here in a minute, Vada. . . . Six-thirteen. The train would be in the yards now. The porter was brushing passengers, the last ones, wiping their bags. "Thank you, sir." Thrusting the coin, or coins, into his pocket without looking at them. He could tell the denomination by their feel. . . He had brushed Vada, very lightly over the bust if she was wearing a

suit, and not at all there if it was a shirtwaist. The skirt vigorously and with rhythm. "Just a minute, lady." He was stooping, kneeling at her feet, the porter was, rubbing the toes of her small shoes with a dust-grey cloth. . . .

"Train Number Eight-TEEN Chicago and points west.

... Track FORTY-SEVEN."

A voice, not human, from a megaphone, a giant deafmute who had learned to talk, articulating shockingly.

Track Forty-seven. Where was it? . . . There it was. A group gathering before an arch-way. Attendants stringing a rope. . . . He would get through somehow. It would be horrible to miss her.

Martin skipped through the crowd. "Behind that rope everybody. Get behind the rope, please." Large men in grey pushing people. "Lady, they'll all come through

that gate. Just stand where you are."

Martin ducked under the rope, and as a door slid open, walked boldly through. He walked swiftly along the platform, his heart pounding. Red-caps were coming toward him, heads bent, both arms taut with luggage. He ran. . . .

III

She stood very near the Pullman platform by which she had left the train, her bag beside her, her eyes following the departing passengers. Doubtless because of the dim light in the shed, she did not recognize him as he approached, and he touched her arm and spoke almost at the same time.

"Hello, Vada," he said. "I'm here."

Swiftly his eyes touched her; she was not in mourning.

She wore blue, with a small blue hat. White cuffs, soft and turned back, were at her wrists, and her collar was open and turned back also, disclosing the smooth lines of her throat. She seemed thinner, whiter, and her eyes larger. Yet she smiled. In silence they moved along the platform.

He touched her arm lightly, helping her in a taxicab. Her voice came. "Where are we going?"

"Way down town," said Martin. "Eleventh Street. I've got you a room there. Why?" He bent forward, giving the driver the address.

"I was just wondering. I feel crazy. . . . Suppose you hadn't met me?" She sank back, her hands in her lap, holding her gloves.

"Suppose the sun hadn't set," said Martin. . . . "Didn't set," he corrected. "Look. It's setting now."

They were moving west with traffic along Forty-third Street, and at the foot of the street hung a glowing disc of red, sinking, sliding, visibly it seemed, into the Hudson.

Martin leaned quickly toward her and as quickly away again. There should be steam as the disc touched the water, soft clouds of it, enveloping the city, enveloping the cab and Vada and him; and in the moist warmth of it he would crush her to him, lips to lips, his breast to hers until there was no air between. . . . White and red flowers did this by night in hot houses, climbing from their beds and dancing, then clinging, clinging. That was why, when the gardener came in the morning, they drooped. . . And as the disc touched the water it should become a bronze gong which boomed, boomed, not too loudly, but with maddening rhythm. . . .

"A room?" she went on. "Where you live?"

"Yes," said Martin. There was a sullen note in his voice. "It's a boarding house, but it isn't half bad. I couldn't arrange anything better just now. We'll do better later. Look. The sun's gone already." They were nearing Broadway.

"I had thought something of the Martha Washington," she said. "I could go there. I've read a lot about it."

"I've read a lot about the Y. M. C. A.," said Martin. "I could have gone there when I came."

He could have bit his tongue. Sarcasm to her. She had not said one word about her father, nor had he asked.

But she faced him, smiling again, her eyes serene and frank. "You needn't have said that. I'm going with you. It's wild, Martin." She laid her hand on his. "It's wild, but as you said when you met me at the train—I'm here.

. . . I'm not afraid of you."

She turned and looked out of the cab window, speaking more softly. "I know you as well as you know yourself. You thought I didn't see the sunset. I couldn't comment on it, Martin. What could I say?"

He touched her shoulder. "Don't," he said. "That's why I like you."

They were whizzing south now, along Sixth Avenue. "L" pillars flashed by, like bridge beams, reminding Martin of his return to Carrolton from college. He and Vada in a taxi, in New York. By the living gods. But he must be calm. . . .

Martin groaned. Fool! Fool! How utterly mad. . . . She was not coming. She would never come. She had read his message and flung it in the waste-paper basket. He laughed. "Fished it out again, though, and

ironed the wrinkles with the side of a lead pencil, and read it over and over. Any woman would."

He laughed happily. She might come after all. Griefstricken women craved excitement and travelling. Widows, if they had means, nearly always went somewhere . . . and bought clothes. Aunt Feddy, after Uncle Martin's death, took a trip to Europe. . . . It would be wonderful, shopping with her in New York, with Vada, waiting while she tried things on. . . . "Now, Martin, be frank. Do you really like it?" . . . Later he would buy her such gorgeous things, gossamer garments for her thighs and breasts. . . . Spiders would make these. . . .

He was unhappy again. He thought only of her body. He must not do that. When she came he must take both her hands gently and say with all honesty, "Vada, you can trust me."...

That door should remain locked.

Chapter XI

N West Tenth Street just off Sixth Avenue, an easy walk from Mrs. Gilson's, there was in 1906 a basement restaurant called simply, Tony's. A plump smiling Italian was the proprietor. From his newspaper patrons, and especially from two or three women writers who took bohemian life seriously, he received recurrent dabs of publicity, occasionally accompanied by sketches; and as a consequence there was a brisk and growing tourist trade snared by such bird-lime as "A Quaint Place to Dine" and by a persistent legend that O. Henry had not only dined there frequently but had conceived some of his best tales at a corner table in the stone-paved back yard, while drunk.

It was entirely possible to get drunk at Tony's. With the sixty-cent table d'hote meal red wine was served free, in large tumblers; and cock-tails were obtainable, along with spirituous liquors of all sorts down to and including a strange egg-noggy drink with a brandy base, the name of which the proprietor only seemed able to pronounce correctly.

As the liquor was consumed conversation grew louder and louder, and finally took on a note of abandon; and the smoke from many cigarettes hung in wavy layers; and then came bantering talk and drink-buying between tables, and lastly, pencil marking on the table-cloths. Parties of three or more going Dutch figured the proportionate shares of the check this way; and talented persons made sketches, while others, talking earnestly of love, or money, or the Arts, traced meaningless designs such as are executed in telephone booths or on desk blotters. . . .

Martin sat alone at a balcony table. The balcony had been built in, suspended from iron stanchions, something after the manner of gymnasium apparatus. It was Thursday night. . . . He had eaten, and he sat drumming the table-cloth with his fingers, counting. . . . Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. . . . Five days, and no word from Vada. Only five days, but it did seem such a long time. It seemed such a long time since he had come to New York. . . . Less than two months really. . . . Less than three months since he left Stantonville . . . and Edna. He smiled. Not even a letter from her. He was glad in a way. Why should she pour out her heart to him?

He beckoned the waiter. "Another Martini, please."
... He could drink and dream. He laughed. "Christ, that's all I can do. Nothing comes true any other way...."

He sipped his drink. He was a fool to have telegraphed her at all. Why should she come to him? . . . He finished his drink, fingering for the small olive, munching it. . . . He should have written. A sensible man would have written. . . . No; a telegram worded as his was more dramatic. It was like grabbing her suddenly and overpoweringly and kissing her. A letter would be saying, "May I?" Any girl of spirit would answer, "Certainly not!" Pique at his clumsiness, if nothing else.

He raised his finger to the waiter. "Another Martini,

please." He would stick to these.

He lifted his glass, holding it to the light. He set it down, for the moment untouched, his eyes wandering over the dining room floor below. . . . Many small square tables, some of them almost edge to edge; bread sticks bristling from glass containers; the cat now, a glimpse only, a big black fellow, his back arched, curving his body against the leg of a table, beneath which he disappeared.

Martin took his cock-tail at a gulp. Small things were so amusing if you saw them right. His eyes caught the

waiter's. . . . "Another Martini, please. . . ."

As he drank he looked to the floor below again. Near the center sat three unescorted women, and not so young. A considerable number of women not so young came to Tony's. Some of them were lean and greying, or too plump—spinster secretaries, school teachers who had never had a fling, restless widows who wondered vaguely just what to do. They smoked with tragic obviousness, pursing their lips as they exhaled, not infrequently coughing as they did so. As the wine took hold, they laughed with more freedom and whispered among themselves, addressing each other as "girls."

Martin's throat tightened. He could see them setting out from small bedrooms, taking one last look in the mirror before turning off the light. . . . Something would happen to-night. Life could not go on like this. A man at an adjoining table would speak, first with his eyes and then, overpoweringly, with his voice. He would say very calmly, yet with great fervor, "I've searched all my life for you."

Martin felt for his glass, closing two fingers gently

on the tapered stem. They were thinking that now, those women down there. They were lonely, just as he was. He gritted his teeth savagely. He was no longer lonely. She was here, across the table from him, alive, breathing, —Vada. . . .

He raised his glass. "I shouldn't say it, because I know your grief, but I'm happy to-night, very happy."

He raised his glass higher, waiting until Vada's lips touched hers.

"How," he said, and drank.

"How," said Vada faintly. Her eyes were sad.

Martin shuddered. . . . "No, don't make her drink. . . . No, with the help of God. . . ."

The waiter was standing by the table. "Do you want something?" he said.

Martin stood up unsteadily, brushing nap from the table-cloth off his coat. His knuckles struck a button, painfully.

"No, thanks," he said. "I think I'll go. Let me have the check."

• He walked slowly. It was early, only about half-past nine. . . . He could roam around a little. No, to-morrow was a work day: he had better go home. He could sit in his Morris chair and dream. Returning from the Sun office, he had done this every afternoon, since telegraphing Vada. He never quite slept, but half-slept, conscious fitfully of the room and its furniture, of the window through which he gazed before closing his eyes, which was a French window, and of the yellowing lace curtains which scurled back and forth when there was a breeze. Sometimes in the street below a hand organ played, but not for long, because unless there happened to be boarders

on the porch, no money was forthcoming, and the organist

would promptly move. . . .

He swung open Mrs. Gilson's gate almost noiselessly. . . . Vada. He had pictured himself holding it open for her, taking her arm then as they passed on up the walk. He would always take her arm. . . "Geraniums along the walk in June, Vada, red ones. Dry stalks now, September." He laughed. "Not us, Vada. Rich red blossoms, tendrils that cling, leaves whose lips move ceaselessly, chuckling at life. They say to the crickets, 'Friend, your fragile armored back amuses me.'" . . .

No one on the porch, although it was quite warm. Martin halted and faced about, gazing toward the street. "God, man, give her time. Wait, wait, WAIT. Big things take time. . . . She may write. . . ." A wave of ecstasy broke over him. . . . She had written. Her letter was on the way. . . . "Martin, my grief has left me numb, and in coming this way to you I hope you understand." . . . No, she would not refer to her grief; she was too brave. And she would not say, "I hope you understand." She would not explain. . . .

He continued gazing toward the street, but he saw nothing there. He saw Vada packing. She was talking

to the thin colored woman.

"Well, Agnes, you might as well take this along, too," handing her a dubious piece of bric-a-brac, or a discarded garment. . . . She would bring very little, a few family pictures, the best one of her father carefully wrapped; and her books. Agnes would help her with these, wrapping each in newspaper. They would have to send for a man to come in and nail up the box. A darkey. Vada would not ask any white man in Carrolton

to assist her. As she packed, people continued to pass the house. "They say she's leaving town. Hasn't been out of the house since the shooting, except to the funeral. . . ."

He could not remember whether Jim owned the house. Very likely not. The only homey place about it was Vada's room where she kept her books. She would leave this wistfully, standing in its center or on the threshold where you stepped down, surveying the stripped shelves, her hands, dust-smeared and tired after her work, held from her. There was a smudge of dust on her cheek. He would kiss this tenderly. . . . "I love you, dirty face. . . . Don't cry."

Martin swung about swiftly and entered the house. Huh! God! Dreams!... He hesitated in the hall. Why look at the mail rack! His mouth was set hard as he approached it.... No letter, of course. There never would be.

He sank back in his Morris chair, quite near the window. He closed his eyes. "The planets smoulder while a thousand years file slowly through the valley of despair." For several days the line had been running through his head, and it came back to him suddenly now. He repeated the words audibly and slowly: "The planets smoulder . . . while a thousand years . . . file slowly through the valley of despair."

There was no sense to it, not much anyway, yet it persisted. It had rhythm; perhaps that was why he liked it. It soothed him; made him melancholy, but soothed him nevertheless. He smiled. Years did file slowly through the valley of despair. . . . What did they do, having passed, the years? Did they run and leap, flinging them-

selves joyously on beds of flowers, wild flowers soft as breath, or did they sit down heavily and say, "Well, that's over." . . . He would write a poem about this some day, the weary passing years. Not now though. He was not skilled enough. . . . But he could make notes.

He removed from his inside coat pocket the small memorandum book he had bought on Park Row. He opened it out on the arm of his chair and looked at his entries. There were two of them: a copy of his telegram to Vada and the date; and these words: "What I desire: A faith to hold, a woman to love, and wholly, and an intellect that's square."

He read the words carefully. . . . "And wholly"

should come out. . . . To love implied all.

His lips curled. God, how cheap! Trying to put life in a note-book. It would take volumes, one moment a chapter, one day an age. He tore out the pages he had covered, yanking them. With his finger nails he picked at the little stubs which remained under the strings. The pages he wadded in a ball and hurled skidding across the room. To hell with it! Any diary he kept would be in his head. There he could work swiftly and with all truth.

He stood up and began pacing. "You, Vada. You did this. You there in the next room." He took a step toward the threshold and halted. "Who says I shouldn't? Not you, Vada." He laughed. "I've got the key. Got it several days ago from Mrs. Gilson."

He moved slowly toward the door, touching it with his hands. "Vada. . . . As I said, I've got the key. I'll

open it from my side. Wait."

Both his hands were on the door now, and his eyes were

closed. "In a moment, Vada. . . ." In his mind he was striking, striking with the side of a hair-brush against the little metal flap over the key-hole, hammering it until bits of crusted paint fell to the floor. He inserted the key and turned hard, pressing with his knee against the door.

As the lock clicked he rapped on the panel with his knuckles. "All right to open?"

She must be standing close by the door, for her voice came distinctly, "All right with me."

Martin laughed happily. Another woman would have said, "Open sesame, locksmith."

He pushed, using first his hands, then his shoulder. It yielded suddenly. Vada laughed as he faced her. It was as though he had burst through.

She took two or three steps toward him; her lips opened as though for speech.

Martin stood motionless. "I just came for a minute," he said softly. "I'll go now.... Good-night.... Here's your key."

"Don't go. Wait a minute. . . . No harm." She was nearer to him. He could hear her breath.

He touched her. "Vada... Vada... For God's sake." His voice rose, quavering. "I want you, Vada." He raised both arms, as one before a shrine... "Just stand and let me look at you. Lift your arms. Walk a little. Speak! I want to hear your voice."

He stopped suddenly, his eyes pleading. "Don't think I'm coarse, Vada. Because I'm not. Nor crazy either. I had to say it. And then I didn't finish. Did you ever stop to think, you can't finish anything? . . . Knees that would shame Pandora's, thighs like a boy's at play, God,

can you blame me for fighting when I've wanted you since that day? . . .

"I can't finish that, Vada . . . and its doggerel be-

sides."

He strode toward her, gripping both her arms. "You look funny at me. . . . Don't worry. I said I wasn't crazy. Think of some other word. Try your vocabulary, you've read books. Unusual will do . . . fairly well. Extraordinary is better. . . . As a matter of fact, why not great? Yes, great." He tightened his grip on her arms. "Do you hear that, GREAT! Every man wants a woman to tell him that, and I'll impress the world. I'm impressing you now." He lowered his voice, whispering, "Am I, Vada? Do I impress you?"

His voice ceased an instant. . . . "No," he said quickly, sheepishly. "No; don't listen to that. Don't

answer it. I didn't say it."

He released her arms and stood away from her, mouth set, ashamed.

"You're queer," said Vada oddly. Her eyes were

troubled.

Martin half-turned away. "I knew it," he said bitterly. "All people say that about me—all little people. I don't blame them. . . . I don't blame you, Vada. Possibly you're little, although I'd hoped to God you weren't. . . . Jim Sanderson's daughter and Martin Lavery!"

He twisted his mouth. "Well, I didn't ravish you, as the phrase goes. I could have, Vada. You see, I'm

strong. . . . I'll go now."

Vada stepped backward, away from him, her lips parted. She appeared really frightened now.

"I'll go," said Martin quietly. He moved to the wall

near the door and stood with his back against it. "Don't be frightened. I'll go any time." He looked hard at her.

"You'd better go," said Vada.

"You mean you're afraid of me?"

"I think you'd better go," repeated Vada. Her face was white.

"Yes, I know," said Martin. "You are afraid. I have wanted you . . . after a fashion . . . nearly all my life, and I guess I sort of dramatized it. I dramatize everything some way or other . . . write it out to myself as I go along. Never get it just right. . . . Never will. You see I want too much: a faith to hold, a woman to love, and an intellect that's square. But they all cheat; they fall short, and then I cheat. I make them stand up: their breasts, their minds, their souls, something, always something."

He laughed softly. "Frankly, Vada, it is sort of crazy. I cuss God about it sometimes." He laughed bitterly. "I cheat there too. Later I say they're prayers. . . ." He moved toward her once again, his arms outstretched. . . . "Oh, Vada. . . ."

She was patting his cheek now, one arm about his neck. She held him to her tightly, her cheek to his, her fingers feeling for his eyelids. "Why, Martin," she said softly, "tears."

He held her from him very gently. He was speaking, and quite calmly. "Vada, will you marry me?" . . .

"Of course," said Vada softly. "Why else should I have come?"

* * *

He sat down heavily in his Morris chair. . . . He stood again. "Write. . . . Write! Balked by the truth, eh? Tell yourself the truth, you God-damn fool. You don't

want to write, you want to pray. . . ."

He knelt swiftly beside the chair, his lips moving. "God, I'm lonely, and I love, I love, I love. . . ."

His head was thrown back now, his eyes closed. "Help me, God. Help me, for Christ's sake. Make me a great writer. Make me a success.... For Vada's sake, Amen."

* * *

About ten o'clock each night Mrs. Gilson lowered the gas throughout her halls. Martin, sitting in his chair, could hear her footfalls outside his half-open door. She wore soft-soled slippers, and she scuffed.

He straightened up, leaning far forward from the chair's slanting red-plush back, stood up, shaking down his trouser legs. He moved to the window, wheeled about and, stopping quickly, picked up, guiltily, the wadded pages from his note-book.

"Yes," he answered irritably. Mrs. Gilson had knocked and was pushing the door open. She stood at the threshold, her hands in the pockets of a small apron of dull black.

"Your young lady friend's downstairs," she said. "Just came."

"What did you say?" The roots of Martin's hair seemed to contract, his scalp to crawl.

"The young lady you spoke about. She's in the parlor."

"Oh, thanks," said Martin. . . . He was walking, he had passed her, Mrs. Gilson, still standing in the door. He was walking down the dim-lit stairs. His young lady friend. . . . Oh, God. . . .

Three flights. . . . He would run, he would skip the stairs. Before he reached the ground floor landing he would call out to her. . . . "Vada. . . . Vada. Hello! Hello! Hello there! God is good after all." . . . No, he would not call. He dared not call. . . . He walked slowly, opening and closing his hands, which were like ice. . . . And his feet. He was compressing them in his shoes, moving his toes, tightening them, one against the other, grinding them. . . . Vada Vada . . .

The balustrade broadened and swept left at the ground floor landing, broadened and swept left under the hall light, pointing at the parlor door which stood wide open, a double door which Mrs. Gilson seldom closed. And there were no portieres.

Martin turned and halted, looking. He held his breath. "Why, Edna." His voice came, dead.

Edna sat facing the door, a little forward in her chair, hands clasped in her lap.

Martin stood on the threshold and said nothing more until she spoke.

She smiled and stood up. "You're not mad, Martin?" "No, not mad." He came a little way into the room and stood looking at her. "But you shouldn't have done this, Edna."

"You'll keep me, won't you, Martin?" She took a step toward him, her lips trembling. . . . "I mean, you'll let

me stay."

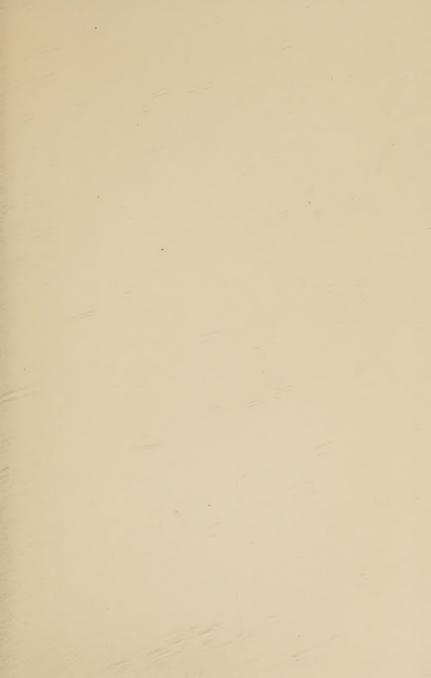
"Why, yes," said Martin. "There're rooms to spare." He looked down at her suit case near the chair. It was of straw and pitiably new. "I suppose you're awfully tired?"

Edna smiled brightly. "Not so very. Not with you. But I haven't eaten."

Martin turned and moved toward the door. "Then come along," he said. "There's a nice place right near. I'll sit with you and have a drink."

THE END









DO NOT REMOVE SLIP FROM POCKET

